

**The United Nations Mission In Sudan****Date: 7 September 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:

Good afternoon ladies and Gentlemen,

EASTERN SUDAN:

-PDSRSG for Political Affairs Tayé Zerihoun left today Khartoum to Asmara for a one day visit to meet with the Eastern Front (the Beja Congress and the Free Lions). The objective of the visit is to follow up on prior discussions with the Front and the GoS on holding "talks about the talks" between the parties. UNMIS is facilitating this process at the request of the parties. In prior discussions the two parties agreed to hold such talks.

DARFUR:

-PDSRSG Tayé Zerihoun will be in the Chadian Capital N'Djamena on 8 and 9 September to attend the 8th session of the AU Joint Ceasefire Commission (established by virtue of the Ceasefire Agreement of 8 April 2004 between the GoS and the Darfur rebel groups SLM/A and JEM).

MILITARY UPDATE:

Strength: Deployment of Military Observers, Protection Force elements and Enabling Units is in progress and as of now, there are 380 military personnel in Khartoum, 730 in Juba, 14 in Wau, 546 in Malakal, 227 in Kadugli, 137 in Damazin, 10 in Abyei and 268 in Kassala. There are total of 2302 personnel in the mission area including 147 military observers.

Arrival. 50 military personnel from Zambia, earmarked for Sector Six Abyei, will arrive in the mission area in the second week of September. In the mean time, another flight of Pakistani Engineers and Force Protection elements comprising 99 personnel arrived at El-Obeid on 05 September 05.

National Monitors. Both SAF and SPLA have assured CJMC that they will provide national monitors, who as per CPA, will form part of Observer Teams along with military observers. Those National Monitors, who have already reported are being verified by the respective Sector Headquarters. The total number of National Monitors needed is 240 (120 from each party). This include the monitoring teams, the representatives at the AJMCs and the representatives at the CJMC.

Preparation of Torrit Team Site. 30 personnel from Bangladesh Engineers have been despatched to Torrit, Juba for construction of Team Site location at Torrit.

Anti- Malaria Campaign. Redeployment and Coordination Headquarters, Kassala, provided support to WHO for Anti – Malaria Campaign, including nine volunteer soldiers and six vehicles Anti – mosquito spray will be carried out for one month, starting from 30 August 05, in Kassala town.

SPLA Troops in Khartoum. 993 SPLA troops have arrived in Khartoum from Kassala on 04 September 05. These troops will be part of Independent New Sudan Brigade. Its strength will be equally shared by both SAF and SPLA forces and will be located in Khartoum.

SECURITY:

Darfur:

- The security situation in the Darfurs remains volatile with many reports on continuing banditry, alleged attacks on villages and looting and reports on fighting around the Jabal Moon area (West and north Darfur). The situation in West Darfur is of particular concern following a series of attacks on INGO convoys. Overall, there have been at least 10 serious attacks on humanitarian workers in the past 30 days, including two attacks by armed men that took place on 1 September. The first attack was on an INGOs convoy consisting of 7 vehicles that was traveling to Geneina via Masteri, totaling 21 staff (two of them international). The bandits took cash, cameras and other personal belongings and ripped out all VHF communication equipment. The bandits then beat the staff members with sticks and rifles while they were lying on the ground. Seventeen persons suffered injuries such as blunt trauma, head injury with stitches, back injuries, haematoma on the scalp, etc. The AU has commenced intensive patrolling activities in the general area of the ambush. The second attack was on an INGO convoy consisting of three vehicles (with the drivers only) was traveling from Mornei to Geneina when it was attacked by nine armed men with covered faces 21 km from Geneina. The attackers stole the drivers' personal belongings as well as one VHF radio. The INGO staff reached Geneina safely later that afternoon.

-The Deputy SRSR and Humanitarian Coordinator Manuel da Silva travelled to Geneina on Monday to discuss with the government, NGOs and the African Union ways to curtail these numerous security violations that are seriously affecting humanitarian operations in West Darfur. An agreement was made with the African Union to increase security along the main routes and efforts are expected from government authorities to improve the operating environment for humanitarian work in the area.

South Sudan:

During last week, four attacks attributed to LRA have been reported, targeting isolated villages and remote areas near Torit. So far, no independent confirmation has been received that the LRA is responsible for these attacks.

DEMINING:

The following information is provided by UNMAS in response to the questions asked last week on mines issues:

-Most of areas of Southern Sudan, Transitional areas, and some of areas in the East (Kassala/Red Sea) are still suspected as Landmine/UXO (Unexploded Ordnance) contaminated, and Darfur only as UXO-contaminated (UNMAS does not consider that there are serious landmine contamination there, but lots of UXOs). UNMAS and its partner agencies are busy working on identifying locations of contaminated areas in order to proceed to clearance activities, and as of 30 June 05, 646 Dangerous Areas (Landmine, UXO or mixed contaminated areas) have been identified, and 100 of them were cleared. But UNMAS would say this is very limited data against the size of "suspected" contamination (approx 30% of the country is suspected contaminated by landmine or unexploded bombs, ammunitions etc), but lack of capacity, size of the country, weather condition and difficulty of cross-line movement have been the inhibiting factors.

-In terms of the victim statistics, there are 1,789 casualties reported to UNMAS offices and recorded in its database. Due to lack of survey capacity as well as effective victim reporting system especially for South Sudan, the exact number of landmine/UXO victims remain unknown.

-With regard to the donor response, UNMAS have about 60% shortfall on funding against requested support. Funding requirements for 2005 is \$82,633,630.

For more details, we have copies of UNMAS Newsletter in the back of the room.

HUMANITARIAN

Food and Non-Food Items

-There have been no recent disruptions in the Jebel Marra area and humanitarian agencies are currently able to operate freely. OCHA is working to create further extend the permanent relief presence in the area. The INGOs has started food distribution emergency NFIs to returnees in four villages. A UNICEF team has conducted a mission to establish 4 new health posts in the area, as well as distribute mosquito nets and primary health care kits. Access to clean drinking water is also a priority sector for urgent intervention.

- WFP, HAC and partner agencies have distributed about 96 metric tons of food as part of its assistance to 7,689 people affected by floods in Damazine, in Blue Nile state. In the areas worst affected by the floods in Almosales, Alsubeir and Almak locations, 2728 people received two months half rations. About 4961 beneficiaries in locations less affected by the floods, such as Alfardos, Alsowra and Alsowra Garb, are receiving a half-month ration.

-In the Red Sea state, WFP is concluding today the assessment of needs of the residents in the poorest neighborhoods of Port Sudan affected by the heavy storms that occurred last Wednesday August 31st.

WFP is also in the process of recovering 56,000 metric tons of food stored in nine of its warehouses in Port Sudan, which were also damaged by the storm. WFP hopes that the actual quantities of lost food will be relatively small.

Protection

UNICEF, the UN Child Protection Unit and UN Military Observers in Malakal and Juba have been working together to ensure regular monitoring of child soldiers during reconnaissance missions. The first joint mission with UNMIS child protection officers and military observers from the UN, SAF, and SPLA to gather more information on child soldiers is today (*Wed*) and joint missions will continue throughout the month (*Sept*). The joint missions will also communicate the urgency of the issue to local militia and armed forces commanders. UN Military Observers will also raise awareness among communities about the specific protection for children provided under the CPA.

-UNICEF held meetings with the Attorney General of South Darfur, the Head of the Judiciary of South Darfur, Ministry of Social and Cultural Affairs, the Head of Police Forces for South Darfur to prepare for high-level governmental workshops on 5 and 6 September. The workshops will cover Sudan's legislation against international child rights standards, highlighting remaining gaps and identifying the way forward. It is set to be a landmark event, since it is the first time that all relevant sectors (judiciary, legislative, law enforcement, education, health, social welfare) will be spend two days discussing the situation of children in South Darfur from a child rights perspective.

33 AU Civilian Police were trained in Kutum (North Darfur), which proved to be useful in clarifying the police's mandate with respect to protection issues. In addition, 14 AU Civilian Police were provided child protection training in El Fasher on 1 September.

Return

-A recent mission by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, has identified two priority corridors to begin repatriating Sudanese refugees the end of the year from the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Western Equatoria State in southwestern Sudan. When the repatriation process begins, some 10,000 Sudanese refugees would return from Mboki, CAR by air, mainly to Tambura. And some 5,000 Sudanese refugees in Rudu, DRC, would return by road via Aba and Laso, mainly to Yei.

-Humanitarian agencies are concerned about unsanitary conditions and erratic schedules of barges that are being used by hundreds of displaced families arriving in Kosti who wish to travel to areas such as Upper Nile, Bahr El Jebel, and Kordofan. The barges have no clean water or toilets, and often remain at Kosti for up to three weeks while waiting to be filled with commercial goods. Once the barges depart, travel can take up to four weeks until some destinations are reached. A 13 year-old IDP boy drowned on Thursday September 1st when he fell off the barge transporting him and his family to Juba. The incident raises further concerns about the safety and appropriateness of the barges being used for return movements.

-Humanitarian agencies are encouraging the River Transport Corporation to increase the number of barges in operation and to operate according to more regular schedules. They are also urging greater investment in Kosti, where way stations are desperately needed for families waiting for barges.

Surge in IDP arrivals in Abyei town

A continuous flow of IDPs are arriving in Abyei, most of them in transit to southern destinations. Additional IDP families are expected to arrive in the coming days. Reports

indicate that many are planning to stay in Abyei, which raises concerns about the capacity of the town to absorb such a number of new arrivals.

Update on Al Fateh area

The **UN Humanitarian Coordinator** and the DSRSG for Humanitarian Affairs and Development, Manuel Aranda Da Silva, visited the site over the weekend to evaluate the situation, including humanitarian needs and response.

On Thursday September 1st, CARE International and the Fellowship for African Relief distributed plastic sheeting and poles to some 750 families who have been relocated to the El Fateh 3 site, located some 40 km north of Omdurman. Further support to these relocated families has included the installation by UNICEF of two additional temporary water bladders, bringing the total to 5 (four of a 5,000-liter capacity and one of a 10,000-liter capacity), with water provided by government authorities. However, water supply and other significant humanitarian needs remain unmet. Information and basic services such as latrines, electricity, food and health care haven't been provided to the relocated by the authorities

Finally, I would like to draw your attention that we have some information material from UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, UNMAS and the latest Press Release of the AU in the back of the room. I would like also to inform you that on September 21st, the international community will be celebrating the International Day of Peace. We have information kits available on that topic. We will be sending it to your respective newspapers and we would appreciate if they you could dedicate some space for information on that Day. We would like to thank Sudan Vision which has already informed us that they will be issuing a supplement on the International Day of Peace. We would like to encourage you to consider doing the same.

Now I'm ready to take your questions.

Questions and Answers

Q: I have two questions. It seems that the fate of the Abuja talks between the GoS and the armed rebel groups is bleak at the moment. In the view of the SLM, the reasons for a suspension of the talks are still valid and that is the holding of their general convention. This confirms that there is an added complication on the ground and on the negotiations process. Do you in the United Nations have contacts in place or can you resolve the problem? Any date for the talks?

Reports circulating the rounds of the death of two AMIS officers as a result of HIV/AIDS infection have brought to the fore fears from the Sudanese community of the impact of this and its repercussions especially in light of the presence of African Union forces in Darfur and United Nations forces in the south and other places in the country. The GoS has nothing save what it described as a specific code of conduct governing the issue. Do you too have a code of conduct?

Spokesperson: On your first question regarding Abuja talks, in fact we do not have specific information on when exactly it will take place. The information we have is that the African

Union has not announced any change of the date for the talks set at 15th of this month. To follow up on this issue and to get a clearer view, I advise that you talk to the African Union.

As for us at the United Nations, in our prior briefings SRSG Pronk informed you on the talks with SLM field commanders in Darfur and his message to them was clear. We do know that African Union mediator Dr. Salim Ahmed Salimis exerting efforts in order for the talks to take place on schedule. We are also aware that the SLM has internal differences. Mr. Pronk carried out the efforts that he told you about and we are waiting for a clearer picture. Again, the AU is in charge of this issue and they are the ones to inform you on what would be the decision of the mediation..

Regarding the issue of AIDS, we do understand and appreciate the concerns Sudanese people. You asked of whether or not we have a code of conduct – yes we do have one. First of all, sex with Sudanese is totally unacceptable. We are here to carry out a particular function and in a way to avoid negative repercussions to our presence here in Sudan, the United Nations had issued a number of resolutions. The Security Council and the General Assembly have issued resolutions – that I personally circulated to you – on the decision taken by the Security Council on the conduct of United Nations forces. This resolution is proof that the issue takes centre stage in the the United Nations including the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General of the United Nations who had issued a number of instructions to United Nations officials and military elements deployed around the world to stress the point that it is totally unacceptable for them to adopt any behavior that may have negative impacts on the community amongst which we operate – whatever this community. Emphasis was particularly laid on the issue of sexual misconduct.

Second – and we had mentioned it in earlier briefings – the United Nations stresses on all Troop Contributing Countries to carry HIV/AIDS tests on elements sent for service under the United Nations flag. I would like to stress, and I hope this issue will not be misunderstood, that the United Nations cannot impose on Troop Contributing Countries to carry out such a test but we are very pleased that almost all the Troop Contributing Countries carry out these tests as a routine test for their forces before sending them to join United Nations peacekeeping operations. This is on the United Nations side.

I hope I have answered your question.

Q: The African Union has accused the SLM of carrying out violations in West Darfur. Are these related to the incidents you mentioned? Who is responsible for the attacks on trucks?

My second question is on the talk on eastern Sudan. What role will UNMIS play on this – is it the role of mediator, facilitator, or what?

Spokesperson: I will start with your second question concerning the role of the United Nations in the issue of the east. I did say more than once that the United Nations is not a mediator. The Eastern Front had requested the United Nations to act as a link between them and the GoS. We informed the GoS of this request and the GoS welcomed the United Nations to play such a role, but not as a mediator in substantive talks on the ongoing problems between the Eastern Front and the GoS. This is only to enable the parties to meet for talks on talks. I do not know whether or not the issue is clear to you but this falls under our mandate to carry out ‘good offices’ activities which aim , as far as this specific case is concerned, at

enabling the two sides to hold talks on holding talks on the core causes of their conflicts. This, and nothing else, is the United Nations role.

As for mediating on the key issues, this issue will be decided upon by the parties when they hold their preliminary meeting which has not yet been held. When the two parties hold this preliminary meeting, we believe they will discuss a number of issues among which will be the issue of who will mediate, the venue for their talks, the agenda and so on. All these have of course not yet been decided upon because the preliminary meeting has not yet been held.

On your other question on the situation in Darfur, the statement issued by the African Union in which it criticized the SLM was referring to what took place in Malam. We do not have any information that could help identify the perpetrators of the other issues we talked about such as banditry, looting, theft, etc. Most of these acts were mainly acts of robbery and looting. We are investigating these issues and will delve deeper into this phenomena that has, as you said, become a great source of concern to us first of all in terms of its spread and second because the types of violations have taken a more violent turn and include an until now unprecedented attack on a convoy of seven trucks. These acts have become more dangerous and more pre-meditated than before and we are following these issues with the GoS, the rebel movements, the African Union and humanitarian community operating in Darfur in order to reach solutions that will allow us to continue in our humanitarian operations without risking the lives of our humanitarian workers. Unfortunately the vast majority of victims from the humanitarian community are Sudanese. The issue has indeed become very disturbing because some incidents have occurred for instance less than ten kilometers from el-Geneina town. Just imagine that you have armed robbers operating around ten kilometers from Khartoum.

Mr. Manuel Aranda da Silva went to West Darfur to discuss this issue. We do hope that all will carry out their roles as required because anything that may affect the humanitarian situation is of great concern and such acts have consequences on the vulnerable groups who are in need of assistance.

Q: SRSR Pronk has stressed in a number of occasions the need to establish the Joint Political Commission. What are the developments on the issue and why has the political commission not been formed till now?

Spokesperson: The latest information I have is that President Bashir has decreed the formation of this commission. This decree which is actually in the form of was signed by President Omar el-Bashir on 30th August. This is what we know about the issue.

Q: Has it been formed then?

Spokesperson: To the best of our knowledge a decree was signed for its formation.

Q: You mentioned ten serious attacks on humanitarian workers in the past 30 days in Darfur without mentioning who are responsible for these attacks. Are these ten among those mentioned in the monthly report to the Security Council or are they different?

Spokesperson: Which monthly report?

Q: The monthly report of July.

Spokesperson: In general terms, we bring these issues to the attention of the Security Council. What I did tell you today has nothing to do with the month of July. We are talking about the month of August and the beginning of September.

Q: Who is responsible for this?

Spokesperson: I did answer this question before and unfortunately we do not have information on who these people are. They are armed men whose identities we do not know. They are suspected of being bandits and highway robbers. One can not rule out the possibility that some of these gangs have evolved into organized gangs that may have started to think of having an other agenda apart from looting and stealing but we are looking into the issue and the African Union is doing what it can. The information we have remains the same – we do not have any concrete information on the identities of these people.

Q: You also mentioned that the United Nations can not impose on the Troop Contributing Countries to carry out AIDS tests on their subjects and that these tests are carried out by the countries themselves. But there are no guarantees to that because we are not speaking of the United Nations but of a state. Doesn't the Sudan, based on her rights to sovereignty, have the right to carry out AIDS tests on these forces?

Spokesperson: This issue has been subjected to lengthy debates in the United Nations. I do recall for instance the case of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) when Eritrea insisted that such tests be carried out on the forces deployed there.

On the legal side, the United Nations can not impose on any state to carry out any tests. This is per the International Law as set by the member-states. Should the United Nations, be it the General Assembly or any of its legislative organs, issue a resolution that allows the United Nations to impose such tests, then will we carry them out. But in the absence of such a legal cover, the United Nations can not impose on the Troop Contributing Countries to carry out such tests but we encourage them to carry out such tests.

Q: You also mentioned that United Nations elements are not allowed to engage in sexual contact with any Sudanese. Is this only confined to Sudanese or even among the other United Nations elements?

Spokesperson: Our main concern is on Sudanese because ...

Q: (*interrupting*) But Sudanese laws prohibit sexual contacts between any persons in the Sudan ...

Spokesperson: I would like to repeat that our main priority is to make sure, as guests in this country, to respect the values its values, laws and religion. This issue is very clear and emphasized in our code of conduct, the UN code of conduct, the Secretary-General's instructions and relevant UN resolutions.

Q: How about between them (international staff)?

Spokesperson: The United Nations does not monitor the private lives of its people but what we do monitor closely is their interaction with the Sudanese community. The United Nations can not post watchmen at the doors of its employees to monitor their private lives ...

Q: (*interrupting*) There are precedents. Earlier reports had it that some employees of international organizations were arrested because they were found engaging in sexual contact.

Spokesperson: I don't know what you're referring to, but the UN or anybody else for that matter can not have a 100% success in preventing these acts from happening, engaging in such contact with Sudanese that is. On relations amongst foreigners, I personally do not know the legal aspects of this issue and whether, by virtue of our presence in the Sudan, we should adhere tooth and nail to the laws in Sudan when it comes to sexual contact between foreigners.

What is most important to you and what we stress on as a top priority is to prohibit such practices in our interactions with the Sudanese community.

Q: I have two questions: The armed movements continue to weaken and run away from the African Union. What role can the United Nations play in this regard?

What is the United Nations position on the SLM which has continued to put obstacles to the resumption of talks and the situation in Darfur?

Spokesperson: Our position on the issue is clear. First of all, our position is in full support for the African Union and the role of the AMIS. We did confirm more than once and in all our talks with the rebel movements that they must fully cooperate with the African Union be it in terms of the African Union mediation for the Abuja talks, or cooperating in the field with the AMIS, be it in the implementation of the provisions of the agreements reached by the parties such as the ceasefire agreement and also in the African Union efforts to mediate when an attack, looting, banditry or theft occur on, cattle for example and the abduction of some people from some tribes. The African Union came in as a mediator and its mediation efforts have scored success in many areas, including mediation between tribes and the rebel groups. Unfortunately, the African Union hasn't been able yet to resolve the Al Malam problem, but that due to the lack of cooperation by the SLA to release the abductees and to the return the livestock. As I said, our position is primarily in support for the African Union.

On our position regarding the SLM, in all incidents when the SLA carried out actions that we regard as violations of its obligations stipulated in agreements to which it is a signatory, in relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and in International Law in general, we pronounced ourselves on these incidents and reported them to the UNSC.

The United Nations and the African Union work together and with the cooperation of other parties and states that hold an influence over the parties to bolster the process.

On what is the role the African Union or the United Nations can play to mend the dent within the SLM, actually, our role is only to remind them that should they want to have credibility as a party with which, the other negotiations' parties, the African Union and the United Nations can deal with, they must reorganize themselves internally, enter the talks with a sincere will and a clear agenda that can be discussed in order put an end to this conflict. And we remind them that if they continue in these practices and remain divided, this will reflect negatively not only on their credibility as a political force but will even erode their credibility before the citizens of Darfur whose interests the SLM claims to represent.

If there are no more questions, thank you all and I hope to see next week.