



UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SUDAN
UNMIS
UNMIS Media Monitoring Report, 19th March, 2006
(By Public Information Office)

NOTE: Reproduction here does not mean that the UNMIS PIO can vouch for the accuracy or veracity of the contents, nor does this report reflect the views of the United Nations Mission in Sudan. Furthermore, international copyright exists on some materials and this summary should not be disseminated beyond the intended list of recipients.

IN THE NEWS TODAY:

- **AU-UN transition**
 - Council for the defence of religion and state call for immediate expulsion of AU forces from Darfur
 - Deputy head of Sudan's delegation to the UN says it is still early for Security Council to take decision over transition
- **UN**
 - UNHCR to probe attack on southern Sudan compound
- **GoNU**
 - Sudanese president to receive final report on Garang crash
 - National Congress Party suspends contacts with opposition Popular Congress Party
- **CPA**
 - SPLM warns it will return to the war path should the NCP reject the ABC report
 - Blue Nile State warns National Congress Party over implementation of the CPA
 - Head of joint defence board says SPLA not to blame for instances of insecurity in Khartoum
 - SPLA says SAF moving forces from north to south instead of south to north
 - SPLA awaiting support to withdraw from Hamesh Khoreib
- **Southern Sudan**
 - LRA rebels clashes with Ugandan army, SPLA in southern Sudan
- **Darfur, Chad/ Abuja Talks**
 - Darfur governor flies in to Abuja amid talks of possible deal with AbdulWahid
 - AU mediators call for immediate cessation of hostilities in Darfur
 - Darfur peace deal possible by end of April - FM
 - Sudan facing new charges of massacre in Darfur - report
- **Other Developments**
 - NGOs plead to the President of the Republic not to endorse the Humanitarian and Voluntary Works Act
 - Authorities arrest citizen in Medeni for possession of firearms
 - IDPs in Khartoum complain of losing children to police
 - El-Mahdi talks of possible existence of Bin Laden camps in Sudan

HIGHLIGHTS:

AU-UN transition

Council for the defence of religion and state call for immediate expulsion of AU forces from Darfur

(*AlRai ALAam* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) The Popular Council for the Defence of Religion and the State had reiterated its rejection of any form of foreign intervention in Darfur under whatever pretext and has called for an immediate expulsion of the AU forces in Darfur

The Council described the recent AU decision to extend AMIS mandate in Darfur for a further 6 months as degrading to the people of Sudan and called for continued mobilisation against the attempts to deploy international forces to Darfur and a militarization and a jihad against such forces.

The council also says it will stage demonstrations in the capital and the regions in protest against the decision by the AU Peace and Security Council and called on the government to request the AU to dissolve the Peace and Security Council.

The council further added it will renew its requests to the government to withdraw from membership of the AU and said it has decided it will send a delegation to Abuja to bolster the talks in order to reach a peaceful solution and end the bloodshed in Darfur.

The council also called upon participants to the forthcoming Arab League summit meeting in Khartoum to take decisive and serious steps for reform of the League or else seek an alternative organisation formed on the basis of the Arab masses and civil society.

The Council for the Defence of Religion and the State however lauded the country's foreign ministry for averting an immediate foreign intervention

Deputy head of Sudan's delegation to the UN says it is still early for Security Council to take decision over transition

(*AlSahafa* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum, New York**) The Sudan delegation to the Un has ruled out possibilities that the Security Council may issue a resolution to deploy international forces to Darfur in its next meeting this Tuesday.

The deputy chief of the Sudanese mission to the UN pointed out that it is still early for the Security Council to take such a decision. The said that Tuesday's session will hear a briefing by SRSG Jan Pronk on the situation in Darfur and that the Security Council has invited Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim to attend and brief it on the political process in Abuja.

UN

UNHCR to probe attack on southern Sudan compound

(*Xinhua/ST* – 18th Mar. **Nairobi**) The UN refugee agency UNHCR said it was sending a security and operations team to southern Sudan to assess the situation after Wednesday's attack on its compound in southern Sudan.

On Wednesday night, two armed intruders attacked the agency's compound in Yei town in southern Sudan, killing a local guard and leaving an international staff member and a local guard in critical condition.

The UNHCR said in a statement received here Saturday that the two wounded in the attack are now in stable condition in a Nairobi hospital after being evacuated by air from southern Sudan's capital Juba on Thursday.

The UN agency said its nonessential staff in Yei traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, on Friday for debriefing on the traumatic incident, which High Commissioner Antonio Guterres said underscored the difficulty the agency faces in southern Sudan as it tries to create a sustainable environment for returning refugees after two decades of civil war.

"The UNHCR staff member evacuated — an Iraqi national — was shot three times in the abdomen during the attack and underwent surgery Thursday night after arrival in Nairobi. He had previously undergone surgery in Juba to stabilize his condition before being flown to Nairobi," the statement said.

The UNHCR said the guard suffered a bullet wound to the leg requiring surgery during the attack by two armed intruders, one of whom was killed while the other was arrested.

Guterres is sending a team from the agency's Emergency and Security Service to assess the situation on the ground. Assistant High Commissioner for Operations Judy-Cheng Hopkins and the director of UNHCR's Sudan-Chad operations, Jean-Marie Fakhouri, will go to Yei, the statement said.

UNHCR, along with other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, has been working since 2004 to prepare communities to receive returnees, building or rebuilding schools, hospitals, vocational training centers and water points.

UNHCR set up a presence in Yei in 2004 to prepare for the return of South Sudanese refugees from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda to the West Equatorial region.

A planned repatriation movement from the DRC to the Yei region due to start next week has been suspended while UNHCR reviews the situation.

There are 350,000 refugees from South Sudan in neighbouring countries, including 13,300 in DRC, and some 4 million people displaced within Sudan

GoNU

Sudanese president to receive final report on Garang crash

(*ST* – 17th Mar. **Khartoum**) A final report into the air crash that killed the former Sudanese First Vice President John Garang, should be presented by the end of March to the Sudanese president, the local press reported on Friday.

The national commission investigating the cause of the crash of a helicopter will present its final report to President Omar al-Bashir within the next ten days.

The rapporteur of the national team said in a press statement that the helicopter crash that killed former southern Sudanese rebel leader John Garang was not due to a plot.

"The investigations are still subject to secrecy, but the commission of inquiry has completely ruled out the hypothesis of a plot to kill John Garang," said Foreign Minister Lam Akol during a visit to Qatar on 13 February.

There was no indication of foul play in the crash that killed a total of 14 people. But many southerners had accused President Omar al-Beshir of engineering an assassination, citing the many air crashes that have killed leading regime figures over the years.

On 14 March, Foul play has been ruled out in the helicopter crash that killed the late Garang. The Nigerian-owned National Insurance Corporation Ltd on Tuesday presented to the Ugandan government a check worth \$3.4 million (A2.9 million) as compensation for the destroyed presidential helicopter.

"An insurer will not pay if he has doubts as to the nature of the accident," National Insurance Corporation Managing Director Bola Ososamya said. "We have conducted our own investigation and are entirely satisfied that the crash was an accident."

National Congress Party suspends contacts with opposition Popular Congress Party

(*AlAyaam* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) Following a recent *AlArabiya Television* interview with Dr. Turabi, the ruling National Congress Party unanimously took the decision to suspend contacts with Turabi's Popular Congress Party pending clarification from the opposition party of the statements of its leader during that interview.

An impending meeting between the party's secretary for political and organisational affairs and Dr. Turabi scheduled for next Wednesday has also been cancelled.

Speaking to the press, Dr. Nafei expressed astonishment that such statements should come from a man of Dr. Turabi's stature and described Turabi as a frustrated man who has lost his political compass.

Turabi's deputy was quick on the defensive and argued that the decision by the National Congress Party was taken in haste and with much emotion as the National Congress party had earlier decided to hold talks with the Popular Congress party as an institution and not with Dr. Turabi as an individual. He said that the decision to suspend was in bad taste as the country is much in need of such dialogue between the political forces.

It is worth noting that Dr. Turabi hinted to *AlArabiya* during an interview broadcast last Friday evening that Sudanese government and intelligence officials were implicated in the foiled attempt to assassinate Egypt's President Husni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995.

CPA

SPLM warns it will return to the war path should the NCP reject the ABC report

(*Rai AlShaab* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) The SPLM says it will revisit the war path should the Presidency of the Republic fail to resolve the problems of the boundaries of Abyei that has been referred to it eight months ago.

Speaking yesterday at a lecture organised by the SPLM at the Sharjah Hall in Khartoum, Minister for Cabinet Affairs Deng Alor said there is no alternative to accepting the ABC Report.

Alor revealed that the ABC Panel of Experts has been recalled by the Presidency of the Republic to explain how they managed to arrive at their decision concerning the boundaries of Abyei.

Alor accused the National Congress Party of unwillingness to resolve the issue and said its only interest is on the oil and not the interests of the Misseiriya.

Blue Nile State warns National Congress Party over implementation of the CPA

(*Khartoum Monitor*) Vice-President Salva Kiir has advised leaders in Blue Nile State to stick to the letter and spirit of the CPA in order to settle their grievances over the non-implementation of the CPA in their state.

“The CPA is clear on the status of Blue Nile State but there should be commitment to the spirit of partnership,; Kiir told leaders from the Blue Nile headed by the state's minister for social and cultural affairs, Abbas Haj Hamad, who protested the slow implementation of the CPA in the state.

“Leaders of the National Congress Party in Blue Nile State have lost credibility but our debate with them is based on the CPA which they are abandoning” Hamad told the V-p.

Hamad warned they will respond by “various means” if the NCP leaders in the state didn't commit to the CPA.

He pointed out that they had discussions with the NCP leaders over the appointment of provincial governors and directors and protested the manner in which these were appointed but Musa Taha Al-Shaib, the minister of local government (on NCP ticket), said they were only implementing Khartoum's policies when carrying out those appointments which excluded the SPLM partners.

Head of joint defence board says SPLA not to blame for instances of insecurity in Khartoum

(*AlRai AlAam*) Elias Waya, the head of the Joint Defence Board, said in answer to allegations that the SPLA is to blame for the instances of insecurity visited in some parts of Khartoum

by Paulino's Matib's SSDF that the SSDF is yet to fully integrate into the SPLA and the SPLA should consequently not be blamed for these issues.

He pointed out that the SPLA has 1,500 soldiers in barracks in Khartoum and none of these but those on duty carry weapons. He said the process for provision of weapons to these soldiers is known.

Sources say Vice-president Kiir and Paulino Matip are soon to hold talks to sort out the issue of integration. The sources add that destabilizing Khartoum and causing instability is not part of an SPLM strategy.

On the other hand, the SPLA is carrying out efforts to facilitate the movement of its forces to various parts of the south. SPLA Chief of Staff Wayai Deng also expects recent contacts to result in a rare meeting between the GoSS and LRA leaders.

He pointed out that some of the SPLA troops in Juba have been transferred to Yei and Nimule while those in Bor, Tombura, Magui, Yei and Torit have also been transferred.

He further pointed out that the Joint Defence Board will be convening an emergency meeting this weekend to discuss a number of issues including the recent attacks in various areas of southern Sudan and the slow nomination of the SAF members of the JIUs in southern Sudan.

He accused some parties he did not name of being behind the continued attacks in southern Sudan and disclosed of plans by the SPLM to comb the area of "these hidden elements who seek to cause insecurity in the south".

SPLA says SAF moving forces from north to south instead of south to north

(*AlAyaam* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) The SPLA has warned that the arrival of two anti-SPLA commanders of the SSDF to the Upper Nile region is bound to create tension in the region.

SPLA spokesperson Bior Ajiang said that the arrival of Ismail Konge and Lardo – both SSDF leaders opposed to the integration in the SPLA – does not auger well in the Upper Nile region. He added that the fact that they flew in on a helicopter from Khartoum to Malakal and to Jebel Lafon shows that there are people in Khartoum who want to destabilize the region as these commanders are on their way to join their forces in the region.

On the other hand, the SPLA spokesperson has accused the SAF of moving soldiers southwards instead of to the north to join the JIUs. "Why doesn't the SAF use its forces already in southern Sudan who number up to 103,000 of which 91,000 are supposed to redeploy to the north instead of bringing in forces from the north.

Bior also criticised the buildup of SAF forces near Hamesh Khoreib and pointed out that the JDB has not been informed of this.

SPLA awaiting support to withdraw from Hamesh Khoreib

(*AlSahafa*) The SAF and the SPLA have issued conflicting statements over the SPLA withdrawal from Hamesh Khoreib due to be finalised by this Tuesday.

A member of the Joint Defence Board intimates that the JDB has been briefed on the administrative preparations to finalise the SPLA redeployment from eastern Sudan and said

its continued presence there would be a gross violation of the Security Arrangements. He pointed out that the SPLA's withdrawal from the area necessitates that a SAF force come in. He said it is not likely that clashes will occur between the SAF and the opposition forces in the area following the SPLA withdrawal but added that the SPLA is bound by the CPA to fight alongside the SAF should the latter come under such fire.

On the other hand, Elias Waya also a key member of the JDB said that the administrative preparations for the SPLA withdrawal from Hamesh Khoreib have not been completed and points out that there was no ceiling set for the beginning of SPLA withdrawal.

He pointed out that it is difficult because moving tanks, APCs, artillery and heavy military hardware requires appropriate means of transportation which is currently not available.

“We (the SPLA) will withdraw in the long run because we do not have an interest in remaining in Hamesh Khoreib,” he assures.

Meanwhile the CJMC is expected to hold its regular meeting next meeting.

Informed sources say the CJMC will be discussing the violations committed by armed militia groups in Abyei, the SPLA redeployment from Hamesh Khoreib and de-mining among other issues.

On the other hand el-Dirdeiri Mohamed Ahmed, a member of the CPC, said that the CPC will be meeting on the 30th of this month. He said that the CPC has not received any complaints so far but has looked into some procedural issues.

El-Dirdeiri says Abyei is not part of the agenda tabled for the next meeting of the CPC.

Southern Sudan

LRA rebels clashes with Ugandan army, SPLA in southern Sudan

(*Juba Post/ST* – 16th Mar. **Juba**) The Ugandan army clashed with the LRA rebels in Bahr al-Jabal State southern Sudan. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) seconded the Ugandan army. Casualties were not available to the press, the Juba Post reported.

The Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels who crossed into Lainya County last week entered Mukaya Payam and clashed with Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) at Warago area North of Yei Kobo river.

The UPDF both on the ground and air followed the LRA rebels and the helicopter gunship could be seen scooping in the area of the battle.

The citizens of Mukaya at Soka village had fled their area and some had moved to Yei others ran to hidings in the nearby bushes. The casualties on both sides were not disclosed to the press, however, people fleeing from the area stated that exchanging of light machines gun fire and mortars shots were heard.

According to the executive director of Yei River County Aggrey Cyrus, the LRA rebels were rounded up by both the SPLA Forces and the UPDF.

In a meeting by UNOCHA Yei office and the commissioner of Yei and Lainya county, the area of Lainya and Yei across River Yei and Kobo is now considered insecure and NGOs such as ZOA Refuge Care have closed temporarily in Lainya County. The UN peace monitors informed the two commissioners that for the area to be called level four is when NGOs cease to operate in region due to security reasons.

The attack has displaced 78 households with a total population of 512 people in Biri Boma. The internally displaced people (IDPs) deserted their area due to fear of another attack. The IDPs are now in Yondoru and Dimu, two centre in Boma with no shelter, water nor food.

According to Boma Administrator of Biri Clement Juma Saimon, the security situation in his area has grown from bad to worse. Most of the people displaced are in total fear of the next attack as LRA rebels frequently cross through this route. He added that the government must address the issue of insecurity in the area because people are going to face hunger. The cultivation of the land is now disturbed as well as the education of the children.

Meanwhile in Bahr-al Jabal State two villages were looted over the weekend, one near the Bilinyang mountains and the other at Mogiri. No casualties were reported but the villagers were completely looted.

Darfur, Chad/ Abuja Talks

Darfur governor flies in to Abuja amid talks of possible deal with AbdulWahid

(*AIRai AlAam* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) The Governor of South Darfur flew in unannounced to Abuja in an attempt, according to sources, to bolster the political process and seek a deal with the AbdulWahid faction of the SLM.

SLM-AbdulWahid sources say however that AbdulWahid has no intentions to meet with the governor and is not aware of the reasons behind the governor's visit to Abuja.

A spokesperson for the JEM said however that the visit by the governor is an attempt by Majzoub el-Khalifa and his group within the National Congress party to foil the peace process and the efforts of the international community.

AU mediators call for immediate cessation of hostilities in Darfur

(*ST* – 18th Mar. **Abuja**) The AU chief mediators for the Darfur peace talks, Salim Ahmed Salim, called for 'an immediate cessation of all hostilities in Sudan's Darfur region, after a meeting with the heads of Sudanese delegations of the government and rebels movements.

Salim underlined the negative impact that the rise in tension and violence on the ground in Darfur, has had on the well-being of the people of Darfur generally and the Peace Talks in Abuja in particular.

He also, said that the security situation becomes unacceptable and high level of suffering experienced by the people of Darfur as a result of the frequent violations of the Ceasefire Agreement in April 2004.

On the other hand, Salim, on Thursday 16 March 2006, held a briefing session with the representatives of the International Partners. He reviewed of the current status of the Talks,

including preparations for the proposed Darfur-Darfur Conference which the Mediation plans to discuss with the Parties next week.

He further stated that the Proposals for an Enhanced Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement recently presented to the Sudanese Parties had become absolutely necessary in view of the grave deteriorating humanitarian situation on the ground in Darfur.

The AU Special Envoy called for continued unity of purpose and collaboration between the Mediation and its International Partners, so as to make the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement possible within the next four weeks.

The International Partners in the talks are: - the EU, Britain, USA, Canada, France, the League of Arab States and UN, attended also by the representatives of the Chadian Co-Mediation and the Facilitators - Libya and Nigeria.

The Deputy Force Commander of the UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) who also addressed the meeting, welcomed the draft Enhanced Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement proposed to the Parties as a means of removing the present obstacles and addressing the immediate security concerns in Darfur, adding that most of the inputs from him and members of his Team were incorporated into the draft.

Darfur peace deal possible by end of April - FM

(*Xinhua/ST* – 17th Mar. **Nairobi**) Sudanese Foreign Minister Lam Akol said on Friday he was optimistic about striking a peace deal with rebels in Nigeria within weeks to end a three year-conflict in Darfur which has led to the death of thousands of people.

Speaking in a press briefing here on the sidelines of an Inter-Government Authority on Development (IGAD) Council of Ministers meeting, Akol said the peace talks underway in Abuja, Nigeria, between rebels from Sudan's western Darfur region and the Sudanese government, may result in a peace deal by the end of April.

However, Akol admitted that a peace deal may not end the violence, due to a splintering of rebel factions and called for apolitical compromise between the negotiating parties.

"We hope that before the end of April, the political solution will be available in Darfur because of all the stakeholders including the African Union (AU) have agreed that we must give priority to the realization of peace in Darfur," Akol said.

The minister said that wide strides have been made during the current round of talks concerning the sharing of wealth and power and the security arrangements' agreement.

He said that a road-map for solving Darfur conflict is to be formulated with the participation of the United Nations, the AU, the Sudan government and the rebel movements.

"A number of steps have been taken. The AU will name a five-man committee comprising the current chairman including some heads of state to raise the profile of the peace so that both parties can see the importance of the talks," he said.

"So we are optimistic that in the next few weeks, we should expect a breakthrough as far as Darfur talks are concerned," Akol told journalists.

He said that the two main rebel groups and the Sudanese government, which started a seventh round of talks in Abuja early this year, are closer on many issues on the negotiating table—including sharing power and oil wealth.

Among the reasons for his guarded optimism was that after the peace deal between the north and south, Sudan's National Unity Government has included the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, creating a "different political climate."

However, the possibility of independence — envisioned in southern Sudan where a referendum on secession is due within six years of the peace deal — was not for Darfur.

Akol appealed to donors not to peg their assistance to the resolution of the Darfur conflict, lamenting that the southern Sudan has only received 30 percent of the pledges made during the Oslo donors' conference.

"The international community should not ignore the southern conflict because of the conflict in Darfur. The donors also should not tie their assistance or the pledges they made in Oslo on the resolution of the conflict in Darfur," he said.

"We are concerned about our people in Darfur and elsewhere. We are concerned about their welfare. We want to stop their suffering as soon as possible and that is why we are striving to see that this conflict is brought to a speedy end," Akol said.

The minister said his country will reject the propose deployment of UN forces to Darfur even after the African Union's peacekeeping mandate expires in September.

He said that the AU forces are working in coordination with all the parties and within the context of cooperation with the international community and the United Nations to solve the issue of Darfur.

"The AU should continue doing its job in Darfur because it has not said it's unable to do its job. The AU has been there for more than a year. We need to hear from AU that they don't have the capacity, it cannot do its job and then we can agree on how to handle the matter," he said.

He stressed that the presence of the AU forces was upon the agreement of the Sudan government and in accordance with a specific mandate for monitoring the ceasefire protocol, which was signed by the parties of the conflict in Darfur.

His comment conflicts with the agreement announced in Addis Ababa last Friday, when Sudan and the AU agreed to extend the mandate of the AU peacekeepers in Darfur to September, and then allow them to be merged into a larger United Nations force.

Sudan facing new charges of massacre in Darfur - report

(*The Scotsman/ST* – 18th Mar. **el-Fasher**) Sudanese government forces massacred their own citizens in a mosque in Darfur, according to fresh evidence presented by the African Union, *The Scotsman* reported.

The AU, which is attempting to keep the peace in the devastated region, sent monitors to the town of Tawilla to investigate reports of a massacre last September.

A confidential AU report, obtained by The Scotsman, reveals that four people were killed and 24 injured.

It came to light as human rights organisations criticised the Sudanese government for its continued attempts to prevent the United Nations from taking over the peacekeeping role in Darfur, where upwards of 400,000 people are believed to have been killed in genocidal attacks.

New evidence of those attacks is apparent in the AU's reports. One details an attack in September last year in Tawilla in which Sudanese government forces had used "heavy and light weapons against an unarmed crowd of civilians".

The report added that the police then embarked on "a wanton destruction of properties, leaving 30 houses and market stalls burnt down" in a clear violation of peace accords signed by the government.

The AU said 30 heavily armed police soldiers opened fire on unarmed and innocent civilians who went to the mosque for afternoon prayers.

The report was signed off by a Sudanese colonel, but only after he had recorded his view that the incident was precipitated by an attack on police by Sudanese rebels carrying grenades in the mosque. The AU noted that a number of police were injured by a grenade.

Witnesses described how the police fired into the mosque using heavy weapons.

Other Developments

NGOs plead to the President of the Republic not to endorse the Humanitarian and Voluntary Works Act

(*AlAyaam* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) The Secretariat for Coordination of Civil Society Organisations has presented a plea to the President of the Republic to use his constitutional powers and not to endorse the Humanitarian and Voluntary Works Act.

A memorandum they addressed to the President of the Republic yesterday said that the Act contrasts with the provisions of the Interim Constitution.

Authorities arrest citizen in Medeni for possession of firearms

(*AlAyaam* – 19th Mar. **Medeni**) Authorities arrested a man yesterday in Medeni for the illegal possession of firearms.

The man who lives in Omdurman was accosted at the Medeni bus terminal and had with him 47 pistols and 94 shotgun cartridges. The police is investigating the source of these firearms and ammunition.

This comes as part of a police crackdown on the spread of unlicensed firearms.

IDPs in Khartoum complain of losing children to police

(*Khartoum Monitor* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) IDPs in Mayo south of Khartoum are complaining that they are losing their children to the police who claim to be operating a dragnet for street children.

A resident of the area who requested anonymity said that the police are even arresting children who are not street children and do not differentiate.

He called on the police to publish the names of children in the camps in the daily newspapers so that people know their children are caught by mistake and taken to one of the camps. According to him, many parents in Mayo are complaining that their children have gone missing for several days, describing the situation as very serious.

El-Mahdi talks of possible existence of Bin Laden camps in Sudan

(*AlSahafa* – 19th Mar. **Khartoum**) Umma Party leader Sadiq el-Mahdi said in a press conference in Dubai that the vast expanses of the Sudan that are not monitored by the security organs in the country and the porous and war-ravaged borders areas such as those with Chad, Uganda and Eritrea may possibly be harbouring armed elements of various groups including *Al-Qaeda*.

He said he does not rule out possibilities of the existence of *Al-Qaeda* camps in Sudan but added he could not confirm for certain the existence of such camps in the country. He said that a high rank UN official has talked of the continuation of activities of such camps in remote areas in the country.

On Darfur, the leader of the Umma Party expressed his support for a transition from the AU to a UN operation and pointed out that the AU forces have failed to carry out the role mandated to them while the security and the food situation in Darfur still constitute a danger to the people there.

He said he is aware that such a transition will further “internationalise” the issue but added the situation requires a more capable force. He said some control measures could be put in place for such forces such as a clear-cut mandate from the UN and barring out soldiers from states with vested interests in Sudan and impartiality of these forces.

El-Mahdi accused the government of compromising state security in an unprecedented manner. “Only during this regime has the UN and the Security Council issued resolutions on the Sudan and it is only now that foreign troops have set foot on Sudanese soil,” he added.

On the NCP/SPLM partnership in the GoNU, el-Mahdi said that this was not a partnership but a state of political manoeuvring.