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UNMIS

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(By Public Information Office)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

Arab Summit Meeting/ AMIS-UN Transition

EU to give 50 mln euros to African Union for Darfur

(*Reuters/ST* – 29th Mar. **Brussels**) The European Union has set aside 50 million euros (\$60 million) for the African Union to help it finance a six-month extension of its mission to halt violence in Darfur, EU diplomats said on Wednesday.

Under pressure from Sudan, the African Union voted this month to extend its mission in Darfur through Sept. 30, while affirming its readiness to eventually hand off to a United Nations force, which the EU and the United States pushed for.

Ambassadors from the 25-member EU bloc gave a green light on Tuesday to the European Commission to prepare 50 million euros in aid, EU diplomats said.

This sum would be the EU executive's contribution at an international pledging conference set for the end of April or May, an EU executive official said.

It would be enough to fund the AU for only two and a half to three months, the official added.

The AU says it costs around \$24 million a month to run its mission, for which it relies on donor nations.

The EU executive has given 162 million euros to the AU for its Darfur mission.

Sudan continues to lobby against UN involvement. It convinced countries at an Arab League summit in Khartoum this week to promise cash for the AU's mission to continue after the six-month extension.

Arab leaders conclude Khartoum summit

(*AP/ST* – 29th Mar. **Khartoum**) Arab leaders concluded an annual summit Wednesday with their usual pledges of solidarity with Palestinians and Iraqis.

The two-day summit, devalued by the absence of several key leaders, also backed host Sudan in its opposition to the deployment of U.N.-led peacekeepers in its troubled western Darfur region.

In a sign of apathy about the meetings, Saudi Arabia, next year's chair country, declined to host the 2007 summit, saying it preferred that it be held in Egypt, home to the headquarters of the Arab League.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, reflecting the notion of the summits' relative uselessness, demanded firm Arab commitments to his country, wracked by a brutal insurgency and a growing sectarian rift.

Addressing the summit's final session, he said: "It is our right to tell our brothers, after decades of the authoritarian rule and wars, that we expect them to support our political march and extend any help and backing that will contribute to isolating terrorism and drying up of the sources that finance its activities."

"It is our right to ask you to upgrade your diplomatic representation to the ambassadorial level and be generous by visiting Baghdad, your historic capital and the cradle of Islamic and Arab civilization...The Iraqis wish to see their brothers among them," said Zebari, who also asked Arab countries to forgive Iraq's debts.

A summit resolution on Iraq said Arab leaders agreed to send diplomats to Baghdad, though it did not give a timeframe. Arab nations have been hesitant to send high-level diplomats to Baghdad since the kidnapping and murder of Algerian and Egyptian diplomats there last year.

The Khartoum Declaration, a summary of the agreements reached in this week's summit, also saluted January's Palestinian parliamentary elections, which produced a landslide victory by the militant Hamas, and called on the international community to respect the result of that vote.

The leaders renewed their commitment to a 2002 Arab peace initiative, which offered Israel a comprehensive peace in return for a withdrawal from Arab lands. Israel has rejected that initiative.

In a coup for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, the leaders pledged financial backing for the African Union peacekeeping mission in Sudan's Darfur region and rejected the imposition of a U.N.-led force without Khartoum's permission.

Al-Bashir has resisted Western pressure to let the U.N. take over from the 7,000 AU troops there, saying that would violate Sudan's sovereignty.

The leaders also addressed the caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad that were published in European newspapers, causing widespread outrage among Muslims and some violent protests.

The declaration urged the need for "cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect between peoples and cultures...and remind that respecting religious sanctities and beliefs is the decisive factor in building confidence and bridges of friendship between nations."

An internal Lebanese conflict also made its way to Khartoum, where Prime Minister Fuad Saniora arrived with his own mini-delegation to counter what he called the "lack of Lebanese representation" shown by the official delegation led by President Emile Lahoud.

Saniora heads an anti-Syrian majority government that is demanding the resignation of Lahoud, who is strongly pro-Syrian.

The leaders did not take sides in the conflict, focusing their declaration instead on supporting Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group - a Syrian and Iranian-backed body that the West wants disarmed - and supporting Syria in the face of international pressure and U.S. sanctions.

The summit also unanimously extended Egyptian Amr Moussa's term as Arab League secretary-general for another five years.

Arab funds for Darfur force too late - AU official

(*Reuters/ST* - 29th Mar. **Khartoum**) An Arab offer to fund African Union forces in Sudan's Darfur region from October is too late as troops need immediate cash to help stop escalating violence there, an AU official said on Wednesday.

"This is medicine after death," said Baba Gana Kingibe, the head of the AU mission in Sudan. "We need the assistance now in order to be able to resolve the crisis."

At an annual Arab summit in Khartoum, leaders promised to fund the cash-strapped AU force from Oct. 1, but the AU has renewed its mandate only until the end of September. They declined to specify how much they would give.

But Kingibe welcomed the show of solidarity for Arab-African relations in the 53-member AU, where there are often divisions between Arabic-speaking states and sub-Saharan nations.

Sudan is refusing to bend under international pressure to accept a U.N. takeover of the AU mission in Darfur, although some officials have said they may consider it after a peace deal is signed.

Opposition politicians say Sudan opposes a U.N. force because they fear the soldiers would be able to arrest anyone charged by the ICC for war crimes. Senior government officials are on a list for possible targeted sanctions for obstructing the peace process in Darfur.

Kingibe said the AU mission, with its increased needs, now cost \$24 million a month to run. There are around 7,000 AU police and soldiers working in Darfur.

"We have assured funding to the end of March," he told Reuters, adding the European Union had also pledged 50 million euros (\$60.02 million).

The U.N. Security Council has asked Secretary-General Kofi Annan to report by April 24 with a plan for the possible take over. The AU has agreed in principle to support the transition.

AU diplomats pleased with Arab funds for Darfur mission, but

(*SFP/ST* - 29th Mar. **Addis Ababa**) African Union diplomats and officials said Wednesday they were pleased with an Arab League contribution to help fund the cash-strapped AU mission in Sudan's troubled western Darfur region but noted it was only a stop-gap measure.

Said Djinnit, commissioner of the pan-African body's Peace and Security Council that runs the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), declined to comment on the 150-million-dollar (125-million-euro) pledge until he had seen details, but others said it was a welcome move.

"Any help for AMIS is welcome, the AU appealed to the international community on this and if the call is heard, the AU is pleased," one AU official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

An AU diplomat, who also requested anonymity, shared that view but noted that the money was not a long-term solution to the funding woes of the mission that costs nearly 20 million dollars a month.

The amount of 150 million dollars "is not going to change the future of AMIS, it is not enough to finance the mission," the diplomat said.

Arab leaders meeting in Khartoum on Wednesday agreed to the aid package to be disbursed over the next six months after host Sudan urged them to reject plans for the dispatch of United Nations peacekeepers to Darfur to replace the AMIS force.

They called on Arab countries to "provide financial and logistic support" to the AU mission but also said the deployment of any other troops in the region required Sudan's "pre-approval".

UN

UN refugee official dies two weeks after attack in South Sudan

(AP/ST – 29th Mar. **Nairobi**) A U.N. official wounded in a raid two weeks ago on a United Nations compound in southern Sudan has died, the world body's refugee agency said Wednesday.

Nabil Bahjat Abdulla, a 48-year-old Iraqi, died Tuesday night in a hospital in Nairobi, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said. Abdulla was shot three times in the stomach when gunmen attacked the UNHCR compound in the town of Yei on March 15, also killing a Sudanese guard.

"Once again, the humanitarian community is mourning a friend and colleague who died trying to help others in a place that has already seen far too much sadness and violence," U.N. refugee chief Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "All of us at UNHCR mourn Nabil's death and we extend our deepest condolences to his family. We pay tribute to his life, and his sacrifice will never be forgotten."

Abdulla, a UNHCR logistics officer from Baghdad who joined the refugee agency in 1991, is survived by a wife and four children. He is the 22nd UNHCR employee to be killed in the line of duty since 1990, the agency said.

The UNHCR mission in Yei is part of an operation to enable 350,000 refugees to return to southern Sudan from neighboring countries in the wake of the January 2005 peace treaty that concluded a 20-year civil war.

UNHCR temporarily suspended repatriation of Sudanese refugees to three areas of southern Sudan after the armed attack and other violence in the region.

Jan Egeland to visit Sudan next Thursday

(*AlSahafa/ Agencies* – 30th Mar. **Washington**) UN USG and Humanitarian Coordinator Jan Egeland embarks next Thursday on a 9-day tour of Uganda, Kenya, Sudan and Chad.

The first leg of his trip takes him to Uganda where he will travel to the northern part of the country where the rebel LRA has been operating for the last 20 years. He will study the situation there and its effects on southern where LRA forces also operate.

From Uganda, Egeland will travel to Juba in southern Sudan where UNMIS plans to repatriate about 4 million refugees and IDPs. He will also be visiting Nyala.

The UN official will then travel to Chad to tour settlements of Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad before returning to Khartoum for talks with government and UNMIS officials.

Kenya, where about 3.5 million people face a drought, will mark the last leg of Egeland's tour.

UN continues in Yambio despite insecurity

(*Juba Post* – 30th Mar. **Yambio**) Despite three days of insecurity in Yambio last week United Nations humanitarian agencies will not close down operations, reports David Gressly, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator.

Only the repatriation program to Yambio has been suspended due to insecurity.

While the UN says it will continue operation, farmers in Yambio say they expect famine this year as insecurity in the country and Western Equatoria at large is preventing them from working on their farms.

Most farmers are spending a lot of time hiding in the bushes to avoid attacks and possible abduction by suspected LRA.

UN asks NATO for continued Darfur mission support

(*AP/ST* – 29th Mar. **Brussels**) The United Nations has asked NATO for continued support of the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Sudan's Darfur region, an alliance official said Wednesday.

NATO spokesman James Appathurai said, however, that any action would be taken in close cooperation with the African Union and would not go beyond the scope of its current help.

NATO now airlifts AU troops into the region and provides some training outside Sudan.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called his NATO counterpart, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, on Monday to discuss the issue of extending such aid on an interim basis.

"No one is discussing, planning or considering a NATO force on the ground. That is not one of the options," Appathurai said.

The United States has called for greater NATO involvement in Darfur, which the U.N. has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The conflict there has left more than 180,000 people dead and 2 million displaced.

CPA

President Bashir lashes out on SPLM over Khartoum draft constitution

(*AlRai AlAam* – 30th Mar. **Khartoum**) Following recent statements by Yassir Erman who heads the SPLM parliamentary bloc at the National Assembly, President Bashir said that such statements describing the draft constitution for Khartoum State as “Talibanic” are unacceptable.

President Bashir pointed out that the CPA stipulates that the Sheriya laws are the basis for legislation in the northern Sudanese states and Khartoum State is a northern Sudanese state in spite of also being the national capital.

The president said that a committee has been formed to look into the issue of the rights of non-Muslims in Khartoum.

President Bashir who was speaking to *AlJazeera TV* yesterday said that Sudan will not accept the deployment of international forces into Darfur as these forces “are here to stay and not only to resolve the conflict in Darfur.”

The president said there is no genocide in the region as depicted by some but what is taking place is action and counteraction between the warring parties resulting in displacements.

DUP to table draft constitution for Khartoum State

(*AlSahafa* – 30th Mar. **Khartoum**) The Democratic Unionist Party is to present a draft next Saturday to the committee reviewing the constitution for Khartoum State.

A prominent member of the DUP and of the NDA parliamentary bloc said in a press conference yesterday that the National Constitutional Review Committee has never drafted a constitution for Khartoum State and described as a forgery and the draft presented in its name and said it is not acceptable.

He further pointed out that the controversial draft is not in line with the Interim Constitution and borrows heavily from the national Constitution of 1998.

The DUP member said that the DUP draft is based on the principles of democracy, consultation, respect for human rights and the rule of law and limits the absolute powers of the governor. It also cites the Islamic Shariya law and traditional laws as references for legislation.

GoNU

State minister says SPLM is coordinating with police on crackdown on courts

(*AlRai AlAam* – 30th Mar. **Khartoum**) State minister for the Interior, Alieu Ayang Alieu, has confirmed that the recent police crackdowns on the *Sultans’* courts around Khartoum are being carried out in perfect coordination with the SPLM and through instructions from the Ministry of Justice.

This comes following recent criticism from the head of the SPLM parliamentary bloc Yassir Erman over the way the police carried out these operations in the IDP areas around Khartoum.

The state minister called on Yassir Erman to first confirm with the relevant authorities before issuing those remarks.

State minister accuses Egypt of blocking returns

(*AlRai AlAam* – 30th Mar. **Khartoum**) State Minister for the Interior, Alieu Ayang Alieu, has accused the authorities in Egypt of obstructing the return of the 30,000 or so Sudanese refugees from Egypt.

He said that the Ministry of the Interior had tried to reach an agreement with the authorities in Egypt to facilitate the return of these refugees but the Egyptian foreign ministry was not interested and imposes fines ranging between 100 – 200 US dollars on any person who wants to return to Sudan ... failure to pay means that person is returned back to Cairo.

The state minister pointed out that the Sudanese government has reached agreement with the respective governments for the repatriation of refugees from Kenya, Uganda, the CAR, the DRC and Ethiopia and a similar agreement is yet to be reached with Egypt.

Darfur

Darfur fighting uproots another 50,000 people: aid official

(*AFP/ST* – 29th Mar. **Geneva**) An upsurge of violence in Sudan's conflict-ravaged region of Darfur has uprooted a further 50,000 people since the start of the year, a senior aid official said Wednesday.

Robbie Thomson, head of Darfur aid operations at the International Organisation for Migration, said the increase in the number of displaced people was the biggest in the region since fighting broke out there three years ago.

"The situation in Darfur is as bad now as at any time since 2003," said Thomson, whose agency registers internal refugees.

Besides getting caught up in the conflict, civilians and relief workers in Darfur also suffer frequent attacks by bandits.

Aid agencies, which are already stretched as they try to operate across an arid region the size of France, have seen their logistical problems compounded by rising insecurity which has left many areas off-limits for their staff.

"Violence is the reason that international humanitarian community doesn't have access," Thomson told reporters.

"I see it continuing. I don't see any cause for it to stop. There has been no solution for the problems," he said.

African mediators start consultations to organise Darfur-Darfur dialogue

(*ST* – 29th Mar. **Abuja**) The African Union chief mediator for the Darfur Peace Talks, Salim Ahmed Salim, on Tuesday 28 March 2006, chaired a Plenary meeting with the Sudanese parties to initiate preliminary consultations in preparation for the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC).

Salim urged the Sudanese Parties to regard the DDDC as an integral part of the Peace Process, to be organized only after the signing of Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) under the continued auspices of the African Union, said Nouredine Mezni, the AU Mediation Spokesperson.

The Declaration of Principles (DoP) signed on 5 July 2005 by the Sudanese parties had stipulated that Agreements reached by them should be “presented to the people of Darfur to secure their support through the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation” implying that the DDDC is a consultative mechanism designed to mobilize critical support among the people of Darfur for the expected Peace Agreement.

He added, the present consultation is intended to build consensus on the terms of reference of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue, and obtain the vision and practical suggestions of the Parties on how best to organize the Dialogue, so as to make it an inclusive exercise. To this end, he appealed to the Parties to exercise maximum restraint on the ground, and not to dishonour their commitment to cessation of hostilities made by the leaders during the last Steering Committee meeting held on 17 March 2006.

In attendance were representatives of the Parties including the Head of the delegation of the Government of The Sudan (GoS), the Leaders of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The meeting was also attended by representatives of the AU Mediation, the Facilitators and the International Partners.

For the expected Peace Agreement “A durable and just solution to the Darfur conflict”, he further said, calls for “inclusion of all the stakeholders in Darfur and for communal reconciliation above and beyond what is possible in Abuja”.

In response, and while generally underscoring the importance of and their support for the DDDC, the Sudanese Parties emphasized that the dialogue should be organized in a manner that would enhance the integrity and legitimacy of the Peace Process.

For their part, the representatives of the Co-mediation, Facilitators and International Partners welcomed the AU initiative and urged the Sudanese Parties not to delay any further the conclusion of a Peace Agreement, as the only way to ensure the return of peace to the long suffering people of Darfur.

Swedish minister cancels Darfur trip because not welcome

(*AP/ST* – 29th Mar. **Stockholm**) Sweden’s acting foreign minister said Wednesday she canceled a trip to Sudan’s troubled Darfur region after a governor there said she wasn’t welcome, citing Sweden’s role in the Prophet Muhammad cartoon controversy.

Carin Jamtin, who arrived in Sudan Tuesday, said she was surprised at the statement and suggested the real reason was Western pressure to send U.N. peacekeepers to Darfur.

Jamtin told Swedish public radio, SR, in Khartoum that she believed the governor's statement wasn't directed toward Sweden, "but rather against U.N. forces, against an international presence and a fear among the leadership for this part of the country of what would happen with a stronger international presence and possible U.N. troops."

SR reported that the governor of the city of Al Fashir had said Jamtin wasn't welcome because a Swedish far-right group had published Prophet Muhammad cartoons, which originated in neighboring Denmark, and that the government hadn't apologized.

In fact, the Swedish government issued a public apology to Muslims for the offense caused by the cartoons, and the Web site that published them and also solicited new drawings was promptly shut down.

Foreign Ministry spokesman John Zanchi declined to reveal details of the governor's statement.

"All we can say is that a governor has said that it is the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad this month and therefore it is ill-timed that a Swedish representative will go (to Darfur)" Zanchi said.

"It is our assessment that we should be on the safe side. The security situation does not allow her to go there," he added.

Jamtin was on a two-day visit to Sudan. She had planned to inspect the humanitarian situation in Darfur, where at least 180,000 people have died - many from hunger and disease - and about 2 million others have fled their homes to escape a conflict between rebels and pro-government militia.

Jamtin is acting foreign minister until recently appointed Jan Eliasson takes the job in April. The former foreign minister, Laila Freivalds, stepped down last week amid criticism over her role in the closing of the far-right Web site that published the cartoons.

Southern Sudan

Ugandan army arrives in South Sudan to pursue rebels

(SRS/ST - 29th Mar. **Nairobi**) A contingent of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) arrived in Yambio in Western Equatoria State on Monday 27 March to assess the security situation after continuous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacks in the area.

The arrival of the UPDF in Yambio is possible because of an agreement signed between the Governments of Uganda and Sudan to allow the Ugandan armed forces to pursue the LRA into southern Sudan.

In a telephone interview on Tuesday 28 March, Western Equatoria State Deputy Governor Joseph Ngere told Sudan Radio Service (SRS) that the Ugandan army had come to prepare for its deployment along the Sudan-Congo border.

"They will be coming but not this force. Of course this is a vanguard, a contingency who are allowed to come and collect information, but they will be coming because we have given them all information about LRA. I am sure they will come." said Joseph Ngere.

Ngere said that the force will provide security along the border in an effort to prevent further attacks by the LRA.

SPLA said it killed four raiders near Malakal

(*Juba Post* – 30th Mar. **Malakal**) Four members of a militia group aligned to the Khartoum government were killed and four others injured by SPLA soldiers in Malakal when the SPLA tried to reclaim some cattle stolen by this group, the SPLA reports

Following a tip-off, the SPLA went in pursuit of these militias who were said to have raided around 200 heads of cattle last Sunday.

Four members of the militia were killed and four others are now in hospital for treatment as a result of the ensuing confrontation.

Other developments

Museveni yet to believe if Garang crash was accident

(*Monitor/ AlAyaam/ST* – 29th Mar. **Kampala**) President Yoweri Museveni may have received a hefty cheque from the National Insurance Corporation for his ill-fated helicopter that crashed and killed former Sudanese Vice President John Garang, but he is still unconvinced that the tragedy was an accident, government sources told Daily Monitor.

On Friday, Mr Onapito Ekomoloit, the President's press secretary, said the government would await the report of the international investigation into the crash before pronouncing itself on the matter, even if it has accepted a cheque of \$3.4 million (Shs7 billion) from NIC, the insurers of the presidential chopper.

Onapito's comments came after those by Finance Minister Ezra Suruma that by accepting compensation from NIC, the State would have finally put the matter to rest. The July 2005 crash also killed seven Ugandans including long serving presidential pilot Peter Nyakairu.

"I hope this puts an end to the whole affair," Suruma said a fortnight ago. "We deeply regret this incident but there was nothing we could do to stop it."

However, sources tell Daily Monitor, Museveni is "unhappy" about the NIC compensation, which was based on its own internal investigation into the cause of the crash.

A senior government official, who declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue said the President would be hard to convince that other factors were not at play when Garang's plane came down in bad weather just inside southern Sudan across the Uganda border.

"The President as a person cannot convince himself that the aircraft with all the instruments it had could simply have come down because of bad weather," the source said. "He thinks that it was either a fundamental error on the part of the pilot or there was an intervening factor but not weather."

The source added that it was unlikely that Museveni would be convinced even after the final report by international investigators comes out.

Speaking at a memorial service for Garang in the southern Sudanese town of Yei last year, Museveni became the most high profile leader to demand an investigation that would leave no stone unturned.

"Some people say accident, it may be an accident, it may be something else. The helicopter was very well equipped, this was my helicopter the one I am flying all the time, I am not ruling anything out. Either the pilot panicked... either there was some side wind or the instruments failed or there was an external factor," he said at the time.

"Another concern of the President is that no amount of money can replace Garang, who was really an old friend," the source said. NIC officials could not be reached for comment about the issue but sources within the company said it would stand by its assessment that the crash was indeed an accident.

"We found out that it was purely an accident," NIC Managing Director Bola Osasonya had earlier said. He is also said that an insurer will not pay if he has doubts as to the nature of the accident.

It is unclear if the company would have compensated the government if it were revealed that other factors, including pilot error, were responsible for the crash. The NIC investigation is the first report that rules out other factors. It comes ahead of the international probe report that is still being awaited.

The Sudan Tribune reported last week that the report would be handed over to President Omar El Bashir before the end of March. Sudan's foreign Minister Lam Akol has told the press that the investigators have "completely ruled out the hypothesis of a plot to kill John Garang", leading to the preliminary conclusion that the report too is likely to conclude that the crash was an accident.

"The government position will be based on the final probe report because it (government) was a party. National Insurance Corporation was clear that it did its own probe," Onapito said.

In another development on the same issue, the Sudanese *AlAyaam* daily reports that Sudan's State Minister for the Interior has expressed astonishment over the acceptance of the Ugandan government of the 3 million US Dollars paid in insurance for the helicopter that crashed with the late Dr. Garang on board.

He pointed out that the final results of the probe are yet to be released but this move gives the impression that the issue has been laid to rest.