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(By Public Information Office)

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UN

Egeland urges support for AU mission in Darfur; Egeland visit greeted with protests

(*IRIN/ST, AlAyaam, AlSahafa* – 7th May. **Nairobi**) United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland on Sunday called for the strengthening of the African Union (AU) peacekeeping force in Sudan's strife-torn region of Darfur ahead of a planned deployment of a UN mission the region, where conditions among civilians displaced by conflict have deteriorated as violence escalated.

"We need a real strengthening of the AU force in the interim period," Egeland said after visiting the town of Gereida in South Darfur.

The UN relief coordinator was greeted by a handful of protestors rejecting "international interference" when he stepped off his plane in Nyala in South Darfur.

But Egeland insisted maximum pressure was needed to prevent more tragedies.

"At the moment Darfur is slowly being strangled, it's dying in front of us," he told the BBC from Darfur.

"Half of the population now has become war victims... so I believe, yes, we are turning the corner, but the whole world has to put pressure on the parties," said Egeland, who is due to meet officials in Khartoum on Monday.

The Sudanese government has been reluctant to allow the deployment of UN troops in its territory.

Egeland's visit to Darfur came two days after the largest of Darfur's three rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), bowed to international pressure and agreed "with reservations" to sign a peace deal with the Sudanese government following protracted peace talks in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. Two smaller groups have refused to sign the peace deal, demanding more concessions from Khartoum.

The UN humanitarian coordinator said the signing of the peace pact in Abuja on Friday is a welcome development and a "sign a hope". "We have turned the corner (...) The alternative [to the peace deal] would have been unimaginable," said Egeland. "What the international community needs now is to help enforce the agreement so that spoiler elements do not undermine it," Egeland told IRIN. The agreement was the first "solid hope" for the people of Darfur since the conflict erupted in early 2003, Egeland said.

He expressed the hope that the rebel groups that have not signed the peace agreement would soon come on board.

Egeland said he had been "very impressed by the heroic efforts" of the humanitarian workers in Darfur, and appealed to the international community to make more resources available for relief work and the peace and reconciliation efforts that might follow the signing of the peace deal.

He also met with representatives of the SLM/A faction that signed the peace pact in Abuja and told them they must now stop all violence.

He described Gereida, where 120,000 internally displaced persons (IDPS) are gathered, as the "epicentre of the severe humanitarian situation" and lauded the efforts of the 200 AU peacekeepers in the town, whom he said had done a good job despite a dearth of resources.

Egeland also spent some time with a group of IDPs in Gereida, including recently displaced widows who fled their homes with nothing.

He had talks with the deputy governor of South Darfur in the town of Nyala during which he insisted that aid workers must be given unlimited access to those affected by the conflict, as provided for the Abuja peace deal.

AlSahafa daily notes in the context of the same story that USG Egeland will also hold talks with field commanders of the SLM and representatives of NGOs as well as local government officials before flying to Khartoum for talks with officials here.

Humanitarian workers had last week expressed fears that Gereida might come under siege following a series of attacks on rebel-controlled villages in South Darfur. Leaders in displaced communities said more than 300 villages around Gereida have been abandoned because of the threat of attack since November 2005.

Meanwhile UNMIS Spokesperson Baha Alkousy has also called on the AbdulWahid faction of the SLM and on the JEM to join in the peace process for Darfur in order to put an end to the killing and destruction in that region.

Alkoussy lamented that donors to date had paid made good on only 20 % of their pledges made in Oslo and echoed Jan Egeland's calls for donors to meet their pledges now that peace has been realised for Darfur.

According to United Nations sources, on 24 April, the Sudanese government used an Antonov plane and two helicopter gunships to attack the rebel-controlled village of Joghana, southeast of Gereida, which displaced an additional 25,000 people. Earlier, on 16 April, government forces attacked and retook the rebel-controlled town of Donkey Dreisa, 50 km north of Gereida. On 21 April, Janjawid militia and government forces jointly attacked Dito town, 25km northeast of Gereida. The attacks have exacerbated the already dire situation for many civilians across Darfur.

Inter-factional skirmishes have also complicated the situation. Fighting between two SLA factions escalated near Shangil Tobayi and Tawilla in North Darfur during the second half of April, displacing thousands.

Sudan says no foreign troops without its consent

(*ST* – 7th May. **Khartoum**) Khartoum has indicated it may be ready to accept UN peacekeepers taking over from African Union troops in Darfur following a peace deal between the government and the main rebel movement.

The announcement on Sunday coincided with a visit to Darfur by UN envoy Jan Egeland, who is the first high-ranking UN official to visit the war-torn region since a peace deal was signed Friday in Abuja.

"The government will assess whether or not it will need the assistance of foreign troops and it may decide to ask for a UN deployment," foreign ministry spokesman Jamal Ibrahim said.

"But such a decision is the prerogative of the government... What is sure is that no foreign forces will come to Sudan without the consent of the government."

Although the spokesman stopped short of saying that Khartoum would request a deployment of UN troops in place of the existing AU force, his statement marked a softening of the government's position.

President Omar al-Bashir has spoken out strongly and repeatedly against any UN deployment in Darfur, insisting that the peacekeeping mission should be carried out by Africans not outsiders.

"We are strongly opposed to any foreign intervention in Sudan and Darfur will be a graveyard for any foreign troops venturing to enter," the president said as recently as February in response to US-led calls for a UN force to take over.

But in recent days, a number of government officials have raised the possibility of a UN deployment within the framework of a peace accord with the rebels.

Ahead of Friday's signing ceremony in Abuja, North Darfur Governor Osman Yusef Kibir had said the government might approve a UN force to oversee implementation of a peace deal.

"We believe that the deployment of UN forces in Darfur after a peace accord is concluded can serve as a guarantee to implementation of the accord," Kibir told reporters last week.

Sudan undecided about UN peacekeepers in Darfur

(Reuters – 7th May. Cairo) Sudan has not yet decided whether to allow U.N. peacekeepers into its troubled Darfur region, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Sunday.

Jamal Muhammad Ibrahim told Reuters media reports saying Sudan would welcome U.N. peacekeepers were untrue.

"This is not accurate. I don't know who made this statement. ... It has to come after an assessment by the Sudan government. If the need arises then Sudan may decide to do so. Otherwise no one has the right to impose foreign forces on Sudan," he said.

Western governments have called for the 7,000 African Union peacekeepers in Sudan's vast west to be replaced or taken over by a U.N. mission. The badly equipped, under funded AU troops have been unable to end the fighting in the area the size of France.

The government of Sudan and the main Darfur rebel faction signed a deal on Friday to end three years of fighting that has killed tens of thousands of people and forced 2 million to flee their homes.

That agreement raised hopes Khartoum might now consider a U.N. deployment because Sudan had said in the past it would only do so after a peace deal with Darfur rebels.

"The situation is, after the signing of the peace accord, Sudan may look into any proposals to helping prevent tragedy," Ibrahim said.

"In this context if there is any possibility for U.N. forces to replace the African forces already in Darfur, this is the decision of Sudan and it is not going to be imposed on Sudan."

He gave no timeline for possible troop replacement. Sudan has also refused to allow a U.N. planning team into the country to assess needs on the ground.

CPA

Amidst and SPLM boycott, Khartoum legislative assembly goes ahead in endorsing the constitution

(*AlAyaam* - 8th May. **Khartoum**) Chapter One of the draft Constitution of Khartoum State was endorsed yesterday by the Khartoum Legislative Assembly despite a boycott by SPLM representatives.

Chapter One of the draft constitution defines the status of the state, its boundaries, the criteria and principles of governance and administration and the official language.

A member of the technical committee debating the draft was critical of the SPLM boycott and pointed out that all sessions on the draft constitution closed at a unanimous agreement by the parties and that there was no reason for the SPLM boycott. He further pointed out that the SPLM representatives did not inform them of their decision to boycott.

On the other hand, the Speaker of the Khartoum State Legislative Assembly said that the absence of the SPLM representatives was only normal as they may need to consult more with the higher leadership of the movement.

SPLA relocates from east in 2 weeks

(*Khartoum Monitor* - 8th May. **Khartoum**) The Chairman of the Technical Committee of the Joint Defence Board, Mjr. Gen. Elias Waya said that the SPLA redeployment from eastern Sudan will be finalised by the end of second week of this month.

He commended the efforts exerted by the Chief of Staff of the Joint Integrated Units who has offered so far 31 vehicles to assist in the logistics.

Joint Defence Council to be reconstituted

(*Khartoum Monitor* - 8th May. **Khartoum**) President Bashir has issued a Republican Decree reconstituting the Joint Defence Council.

The council will convene a meeting and promises to resolve all outstanding issues regarding the implementation of security procedures stipulated in the CPA.

The first meeting of the Joint Defence Council will be convened in the third week of the current month.

Darfur/ Abuja talks/ Chad

Chad accused of launching attack on West Darfur

(*AlRai AlAam* - 8th May, **Khartoum**) A government source has accused Chad of launching an attack on West Darfur that resulted in 11 deaths and a number of injuries.

Reports say that Chadian forces backed by Sudanese armed groups opposed to the recent peace deal on Darfur attacked Teletel in West Darfur killing 11 people and injuring others. 13 of the attackers were also killed before they fled on their two tanks and a number of 4x4 vehicles.

Sudan wants Darfur rebel JEM to join peace deal - official

(*ST* – 7th May, **Khartoum**) The Sudanese ruling party appeared totally disinterested by the signing of Darfur rebel faction of AbdulWahid al-Nur and looking forward to Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) of Khalil Ibrahim to join the deal.

Deputy Chairman of the National Congress for Political and Organization Affairs, Nafei Ali Nafei told reporters yesterday that his party would make efforts to convince the rebel JEM of Khalil Ibrahim to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement.

The African Union mediators gave the rebels groups who rejected the agreement a delay of reflexion up to 15 May.

Actually, a splinter group of the SLM AbdulWahid faction led by Abdelrahman Musa Abakr has also signed the peace agreement on Friday 5 May. Abakr, who is the SLM top negotiator, in a press statement issued Saturday 7 May in Abuja criticised AbdulWahid's "dictatorial leadership". He further said that Darfur Peace Agreement constitutes a base for the realization of peace, settlement and development of the region in the future.

It seems that the National Congress plans to convince the Fur tribe — of AbdulWahid al-Nur — traditional leaders and marginalise AbdulWahid in the next stage.

According to the AU brokered agreement a "Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Reconciliation" will be held within 60 days, "at which representatives of every group in the region can meet to begin the process of stitching the social fabric back together again, addressing problems such as land tenure and migration of nomadic communities".

Nonetheless, analysts think that the rebel JEM has a national agenda, and is closely linked to Hassan al-Turabi. All these factors explain the inflexible position of this movement.

The government last year accused JEM of playing a central role, along with leaders of Turabi's Popular Congress party, in an alleged plot to overthrow al-Bashir.

Darfur SLM starts implementation of peace deal

(*Xinhua /ST* – 7th May, **Khartoum**) A key faction in the rebel Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) announced on Sunday that it started implementing a peace agreement signed with the government in Sudan's restive western region of Darfur.

Saif al-Din Haroun, spokesman of Minni Arkou Minnawi, leader of the main faction of SLM, told the pro ruling party Sudanese Media Center (SMC) that "We put down arms once for all and entered the process of implementing the peace process."

Repatriation of refugees and reconstruction of war-affected areas in Darfur are now the biggest challenge to the SLM after it signed the peace agreement with the government, Haroun said.

Minawi's faction signed the peace agreement with the government in the Nigerian Capital Abuja on Friday, deserting his rival faction in the SLM led by Abdu al-Wahid al-Nour.

Al-Nur's faction and another smaller rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) led by Khalil Ibrahim, refused to ink the peace agreement, claiming the deal did not meet their demands, which include a Darfur regional government, a post of Sudanese vice president and compensation for victims of the conflict.

However, a senior assistant to al-Nour Sunday announced his break-up with al-Nour to honor the Abuja peace agreement.

Abdelrahman Musa lauded the agreement in a statement, saying it fulfilled many aspirations of the people in Darfur, the SMC said.

Musa also blasted al-Nour, describing him as "a dictator who wants to foil Abuja peace negotiations."

He said that all military and political leaders in the SLM, except for al-Nur, supported the agreement and would participate in all stages of the implementation of the peace deal.

Women lawmakers denounce sexual violence in Darfur

(*Xinhua/ST* – 7th May. **Nairobi**) Women lawmakers from across the globe on Sunday denounced rape and sexual violence during armed conflict especially in Sudan's volatile region of Darfur.

Speaking in Kenya's capital of Nairobi on Sunday, more than 170 women legislators from 117 countries who are attending the 114th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) said the violence against women in Darfur where a three-year conflict has killed thousands of people and displaced million others must be stopped.

"The untold suffering of women in Darfur, western Sudan, in the hands of militants is a worrying trend that must be stopped. Of greatest concern is the reported cases of rape and murder," said Kenyan Assistant Minister of Education, Beth Mugo.

"Kenyan Parliament was until this week debating a bill for enactment of the Sexual Offenses Bill. It prescribes stiffer and enhanced penalties for sexual offenses as way of combating sexual violence against women," Mugo who is also the IPU chairperson of women parliamentarians, added.

More than 1,000 lawmakers from 117 sovereign states are attending a five-day Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) meeting which is due to be officially opened by Kenyan President Kibaki on Sunday night.

Southern Sudan

Salva Kiir proposes talks initiative between Uganda government and the LRA

(*AlAyaam* - 8th May. **Khartoum, Juba**) Talks last Wednesday between GoSS President Salva Kiir and deputy Riek Machar on the one hand and Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony on the other has culminated in the consent of the Lord's Resistance Army leader to a GoSS proposal to broker talks between the rebel group and the Uganda government it fights against.

Dr. Riek Machar said the Lord's Resistance Army leader briefed them on his views and they promised to carry these observations to the Ugandan side when GoSS President Salva Kiir travels to Kampala in the coming few days.

SAF, SPLA and UPDF chiefs to hold meeting next week on LRA

(*AlSahafa* - 8th May. **Khartoum**) Chiefs-of-Staff of Uganda's UPDF, the SAF and the SPLA will hold a meeting next week in Juba or Khartoum to discuss the extension of the military protocol signed between the two countries and that allows the UPDF to pursue the Lord's Resistance Army rebels within a certain radius inside Sudanese territory.

Uganda's defence minister was in the country last week for talks along the same lines with his Sudanese counterpart.

Eastern Sudan

Eastern Front doubtful of government's intentions on talks

(*AlAyaam* - 8th May. **Khartoum**) The Eastern Front has expressed doubts over government's commitments to talk with them.

The deputy Secretary-General of the Eastern Front says the government side has been issuing conflicting statements on the issue. He pointed out that such statements impede the prospect of talks.

He called upon the government to clarify its position by issuing a political statement to give impetus to the negotiations process instead of reacting to foreign pressures.

Asked to comment on recent statements by the JEM leader bidding for a place in the talks on eastern Sudan, the deputy Secretary-General pointed out that the Eastern Front is an independent body and is not obliged to heed to some foreign agenda imposed on it.