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PRESS BRIEFING

Transcript of Press Conference by SRSB Pronk

Mr. George Somerwill (Acting Spokesperson): Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen; thank you very much for joining us. On behalf of UNMIS, I would like to wish you all a very happy New Year, and all the best for 2006, and we are very fortunate this afternoon to have been joined by the SRSB Mr. Pronk, who has a number of issues he wants to speak to you about, so without any further to do, let me hand the chair over to Mr. Pronk.

SRSB Mr. Pronk: Thank you. I would like to add my best wishes to you personally for the coming year 2006, and through you also to your readers, listeners, viewers, and to all people of Sudan. Hopefully 2006 will be a year of more peace than before. I think 2005 was a better year – with all the problems it had - than 2004. But I hope that there will also be further progress towards peace in 2006. At the same time, I think it's also – since we are still around the New Year – appropriate to congratulate you with the 50th anniversary of the Sudanese Independence. In my view that is a great day laid behind us. I was present at the ceremony in the Presidential Palace, where the President did make a speech. It's a very important occasion. I think I have said before - with the exception of some countries which were never completely colonized during the colonial period in Africa, like Liberia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa - Sudan was the first country, which did gain its independence after the process of decolonization. So you are the first country which did have that ceremony. Sudan will also bit later host the African summit, and that is important reason also to congratulate the people of Sudan having taken a lead 50 years ago. I understand when I was in the audience of the president that a number of Presidential awards were granted to some of the pioneers in Sudan around the day of independence 50 years ago. I think it's important for any country to cherish its pioneers who went first on the road towards liberation. And I hope that 50 years from now in the future, President of the Sudan can give similar awards to pioneers on the road to peace, in the period just marking the change from the first 50 years to the second 50 years.

I did greatly enjoy the Presidential speech, which – I must say – was a speech full of dedication towards on-going peace can become feasible in the country as a whole. Also dedication to constitutional rights and a number of other important issues, for instance explicitly mentioning the millennium developmental goals, this was quite important, and also poverty reduction. The year 2006 is the first year of the second half of the first century after the Independence. I hope it will be a year whereby such commitments and promises become implementable.

Cairo Events: May I add to all these words of congratulations also a word of condolence, to the Sudanese people, and in particular to the families of the - I think now - 28 people who were killed in Cairo. It is extremely sad occasion that people who were already refugees and had to leave their homes in the past, and were gathering in very difficult circumstances on the street, not seeing any perspective in any country. They didn't want to go home. They didn't want to stay in Egypt, because they thought that it wouldn't be their home in the future. They didn't get a perspective on a third country. So these people felt that there were no where and they cried out for help. This resulted finally in extremely violent situation leading to so many dead people. We are only on-lookers from outside in a different country. In my position as SRSR here in Sudan I have nothing to do with what is going on in another country. But these are Sudanese people, and I want to pay my condolence to the Sudanese as such, and wish this will never happen again.

Darfur: OK, let us go to a number of important specific security and political issues. First: On Darfur. May I say that I'm quite concerned at the moment about the situation in the west of western Darfur in particular. The security situation in West Darfur – in particular in the Western part of West Darfur just across the border on this site – is very tense. Also due to tension between Chad and Sudan, I'm very concerned that tension may get out of control. I'm also concerned about the possible consequences of that on the people of Darfur and also on the people in the other side of the border. The history of Darfur also is a history whereby the insecurity and instability in Chad is rolling across the border into Darfur itself, because the security situation in Darfur had always been influenced by events in Chad.

We see at the moment a build up of troops on both sides of the border. We also see accusations being made mutually by Chad against Sudan, and Sudan against Chad. I very much hope that on both sides, the leaders of the countries will be very wise and will do everything to mollify the conflict and will do everything not only in terms of security measures by sending military and security personnel, but also in political terms to keep the tension under control. I can not imagine that accusations coming from Chad to Sudan would bare any true basis, because what would be the reason for the Sudanese authorities to fuel conflict in Chad. I do not see any Sudanese reasonable rational motive to do so.

Accusations are always unwise, because it fuels the conflict in many people in the region and (people) on the streets are going to believe such accusations. So my appeal to the wisdom of the leaders is so heartily meant. I hope that the meeting in Tripoli can take place, despite the various different and conflicting information, which I'm receiving that the meeting would be postponed or would be cancelled. A meeting by countries in the region could also play a moderating role and would always be healthy. I'm pleased with the fact that the African Union is also conducting some initiatives in order to assist the two countries in mending their relationships. As far as the situation in west Darfur itself is concerned, there is a lot of insecurity, which partly is due to the tension between the two countries, it is also due to the fact that there are quite a number of Chadian opposition groups now in West Darfur. At the same time, banditry has increased a lot in west Darfur. I must say that we hardly are able to carry out humanitarian and development activities. Even in Geneina itself, there is increased insecurity at the moment so we have to curtail many activities, which are above what is the bare minimum in order to help the people concerned, and that again is a negative consequence of what is going on at the moment in west Darfur. I'm very concerned, we having discussions internally, and also with the authorities in New York, who are also asking us about what is going on, and also with a number of countries, which are asking us to give them some advice about what is going on, we are also having discussions with the authorities

in west Darfur and with the authorities here in Khartoum on the security situation which is quite serious at the moment. I cannot say more about that at the moment other than I would express my concerns, and really hope that measures can be taken not only to guarantee security throughout west Darfur by all authorities, understanding that of course the Darfurian authorities can not control everything. Because partly the insecurity is the result of factors outside west Darfur, coming from Chad. Also I hope that all leaders can address the causes of the tension and not only the consequences of the tension. This may be an issue that can also be discussed in Abuja.

Abuja: I must say that I'm quite concerned about the slow pace of the talks at the moment. The African Union has done a very good job in facilitating and organizing the mediation. They have been very active and they have conformed to good, substantive proposals in all the fields of concern. But the pace of the talks is extremely slow. You remember that I have set as an objective a year ago in January, the 31st of December as the day where following the peace agreement in Nairobi on the South, that there should be a peace agreement on Darfur. I'm utterly disappointed that that objective could not be met. And I understand of course all factors underlining it. The split within SLA is one factor. Another factor for instance is the tension between the two countries, this is number two. At the same time, I must say that the negotiators perhaps could have stayed many more days in Abuja to talk. Because, there were too many breaks. Some slips are acceptable of course, that is the way it is. But I really urge everybody concerned to do their utmost to reach an agreement in the seventh round, and not to adjourn for another break and then have an eighth round. The seventh round should be the final one. I remember that at the end of the sixth round and also at the opening session of the seventh round, all parties committed themselves to reaching an agreement at the end of the seventh round and before the end of the calendar year 2005 linked to each other because the original idea was to end the seventh round on the 31st of December. Now one of the two objectives was not met, not the 31st of December. The other objective still can be met at the end of the seventh round, if you don't stop the seventh round and continue talking rather than adjourning. In other negotiations in the world sometimes the decision was taken by the parties in such talks: to stop the clock at mid-night. We don't say it's already the 31st; stop the watch on the 31st of December in order to increase the urgency. Parties should have stopped the clock at 12 of the 31st of December and say it's still the seventh round and it's still the 31st of December and that we really want peace. Each time there is a new reason: Tripoli meeting, the tension between Chad and Sudan, the African Union Summit, Eid, whatsoever, Christmas. Each time there is a new reason to postpone and prolong the discussion. The parties should be very much aware of the people on the ground; the three million which are affected. They have nothing to do with Tripoli or tension or holidays. They are suffering. And could I add again something which I have mentioned many times that humanitarian assistance for the next year is not secured. I said so already in April in last year: humanitarian assistance for the year 2006 is not secured. It's going down, and I mentioned many times the reason why? Parties should understand that if they do not reach a timely conclusion, it is not at all certain that the people who are the real victims and they are not at the negotiation table themselves, will be affected twice not only because they have been chased away from the places where they used to live, but also because they are not then able to get the all humanitarian assistance which they need.

Eastern Sudan: I was a month ago in some camps of refugees in the South, and yesterday I was in the East having discussion with WFP on the humanitarian assistance to people in camps (there). The people and refugees from Eritrea in East Sudan who are there for many years and now have to live with half rations. This is hardly possible. The half rations are to a

certain extent due to the fact that the international humanitarian assistance is not keeping pace with the need for that assistance. It would be another tragedy, if the people in the camps in Darfur would not be able to get all the assistance necessary. That is of course is the responsibility of the international community, but not only of the international community. There is also the responsibility of the people at the negotiation table to reach a result soon. So that the perspective for the three million affected people to go home to get jobs and plant their land and to provide security also at their home. I will go to Abuja again tomorrow in order to have discussion with the participants and I will urge them to speed up the talks and to discuss all the issues pending - power sharing, wealth sharing, and also security. And not to find reasons, excuses, and motives to prolong the talks further, but to take the negotiation really in their own hands. Yesterday and the day before yesterday I was in Kassala and I discussed the situation in the East. You know that in CPA the decision was made that SPLM would be redeployed from the East of Sudan at the 9th of January, which is one year after the signing of the CPA, and then the Government could move in. Just as in the South, within another frame-work of time the Government would gradually move out and then SPLM would move in; that is the CPA. SPLM has partly moved out of East Sudan in the course of last year. I think about 1500 troops with equipment have moved out but they still have troops over there. And there is Joint Defense Board, which was established, and that is a good step between the Government and SPLM. Because a decision was made to grant SPLM another month for redeployment, because it's difficult for them to do it before the 9th of January. I very much hope that such redeployment will have to take place according to the CPA.

But this should not result in an empty situation, whereby other parties starting a fight. The Government of course is having the right to get in the areas where SPLM was and I understand that the Government is intending to do so. At the same time, we came to hear that the Eastern Front will not allow so, which means that there may be a fight between the Government forces and the Eastern Front, I'm very concerned about it, and very worried. As a matter of fact our whole effort was to have a parallel peace process between the Government and the Eastern Front, which would lead to a kind of peace agreement at the end of 2005 or ultimately at the 9th of January, which would create a stable background for the redeployment of SPLM, to avoid having the two parties confronting each other. I have informed you about a number of initiatives which we have taken last year. I have just informed you that at a certain moment the Government and Eastern Front decided in favor of Libya as the mediator rather than the mediator proposed by the UN. Of course the parties are free to choose their own mediators completely. I was very concerned that the fact that the mediation led by Libya will start after the 9th of January. Because then there will be no balance and no harmony any more between the peace process in the East and with the role of SPLM, and I wonder to which extent the parties were aware of this problem. I'm also very worried about the fact that now part of the Eastern Front have said that they are not willing to go to Tripoli because of a split in the Eastern front, which is a result of a special agreement between the Government and Alrashydda. This even could lead to postponement of the talks, and that is a reason of major concern about stability in the Eastern Sudan. We urge the Bija, Alrashydda, and the Government to have talks as soon as possible under any trusted mediator – why not Libya? – but to talk anyway, not to postpone the talk, because talking is the only way to contain insecurity.

To do so, I'm sending a delegation this week again to Asmara to urge the Eastern Front to unite and to talk. I understand from the Government in Khartoum that they do not at all aim to split the Eastern Front by having special discussion with Alrashydda, because they say it's a discussion only to reconfirm an old agreement which they had in the year 2000. I have no

reason not to believe either Alrashyadda or the Government when they say so. But the perception in another circle, in particular the Bija, is different, and if they see a reason in this agreement not to go to Tripoli, then I think it's the task of the Government and Alrashayda to make clear to the Bija, the other part of the Eastern front, that there were no bad intentions to split the Eastern front. The most important thing is to have parties that trust each other and then on that basis they talk rather than have an unstable (relationship). It's also important for humanitarian reasons because the situation in Hamishkorieb - which is the main region in the East where at the moment there is a conflict - is not good. The CJMC, you know the body of the CPA chaired by the Force Commander, which meets each two weeks, decided yesterday to send a mission to Hamishkorieb, which consists of SPLM, the Government, and the UN, on the 15th of January – next week – I really hope this will be possible and will take place. Yesterday I urged our own people in Kassala to do everything to make that delegation possible to Hamsihkorieb. So far the UN has not been able to get in to Hamishkorieb, because we were not able to get access, because the Eastern Front did not allow us to get in, which is also a reason to be a critical on the Eastern front because they are representatives of their own people living in Hamishkorieb. This month is going to be an important month for the future of Eastern Sudan. On the 9th of January, the delegation of the CJMC to Hamishkorieb and the possible start of talks led by Libya, are important events which can determine the possibility to reach peace in the East.

Statements By the Presidency: I'm pleased that – and that is another issue – in the last couple of days a week before the ceremonies on the 9th of January, which one year after the signing of the peace agreement, a number of important decisions have been made by the Presidency on the basis of the CPA, many institutions which had to be established on the basis of the CPA, now have been established; not all of them, but may be all of them will be established within one year. Which means a delay, but was a delay without major consequences so far. I'm pleased, for instance, that the National Petroleum Commission by now has held meetings; though difficult meetings I understand, but I'm pleased that anyway people talk. I'm pleased that the National Petroleum Commission was established and that there was also the appointment of the Southern Sudan Supreme Court. I just mentioned some examples. I'm also pleased that JDB (Joint Defence Board) also has been established, and, extremely important in relation to this, now that also the Joint Integrated Units Acts was endorsed by the National Assembly. This now makes it possible with these two decisions to start the formation – on the ground – of the joint Integrated Units, which are so important also for security in the South. I'm also pleased that now the members of the Constitutional Court were sworn-in last week and that some decisions also have been taken couple of days ago – I think even yesterday - with regard to the institutions concerning the National Capital – Khartoum – minorities, etc. And that already two meetings of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission have been held.

Finally, I'm also pleased that we were able to sign the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which has been negotiated between the UN and the Government of National Unity. Also all of these various works are examples of the words of the President committing himself to the implementation of the CPA again, in his presidential speech, and they are very seriously meant words, and I will report next week on these to the Security Council.

Report to Security Council: After my trip to Abuja this week, I will travel next week to New York, where I will have a meeting with the Secretary-General and the Security Council, whereby I will inform the Security Council both with regard to the implementation of CPA on the basis of my regular three-month report and also on the situation in Darfur. I'm much

more positive about the implementation of the CPA in the South, than I can be about the situation in Darfur.

Press freedom: May I finally say that I'm concerned about the arrest of your colleague Dr Zuhair el-Sirag, though I know he has been set free by this time, because he wrote an article in Al Sahafa, which was not to the liking of the national security authorities. In my view this is not a good sign. A couple of months ago I did mention something about my pleasure with regard to the lifting of the censorship, and I see also very important steps been taken in practice that the press can become more free to criticize the situation in the country. That is an important part of democratization. We don't have censorship in advance anymore. Some of you can say there may be censorship not preemptive but retroactively. Well it's a pity that the national security is still active against critical voices. I really hope that a possible legal procedure following this will result in a good solution and that this is not going to be repeated again. A strong, democratic and critical press is necessary for the function of any society. Thank you very much.

Mr. George Somerwill (Acting Spokesperson): Thank you very much SRS. I would now like to throw the floor open to your questions for the SRS.

Q & A

Q: (Al Sahafa Newspaper) SAF and SPLM should have submitted lists including allied forces for consideration of the Joint Defense Board; have they done so? What is the affect of Sudan-Chad tension on the situation in Darfur?

A: Yesterday the meeting of the CJMC took place, and I have not seen the report on that meeting. Because the Force Commander chairing that meeting has not yet returned, and I will have a meeting with him at the end of the day. So allow me not to answer that question. I do not know what happened in the CJMC meeting yesterday. We can give you some information after the return of the Force Commander. By the way the intention of the Force Commander is also to give a press conference very soon here, and you can ask him questions about his evaluation of - as Force Commander - the functioning of CJMC, and I'm sure you are aware that the Force Commander is going to leave by the end of this month. In this particular issue you do not have to wait for the press conference of the Force Commander of course we will give you information upon his return. Is that all right? And your second question was about the consequences of Chad-Sudan tension on Darfur. I did not say conflict, but tension. I already said that I'm worried about the tension and that I can hardly believe that there is any truth in the allegations coming from Chadian sources to the Government of Sudan. What would be the Sudan government's motive behind that? Is it to increase the insecurity, violence and tension in Chad? I can not imagine any motive for the Government of Sudan and I am not willing to explore on that.

But of course it's difficult for Darfur, because tension between Sudan and Chad has consequences to reach a peace agreement in Darfur and on Darfur and I am very worried about that, and that is what I said and I do not want to go further on that at the moment.

Q: SAF were supposed to reduce its forces in Southern Sudan; is there any indication that there was SAF reduction of forces in the South? Concerning the East, the SPLM has already submitted a request for assistance in order to pull out; I wonder did they get that?

A: Yes. SAF forces are leaving the South. You know that there is a redeployment schedule whereby they have to reach a deadline somewhere in February. It will be difficult for them, but they have to, and if they don't there is a violation (of the CPA) .

I know there are quite a number of people in the South who think that there is no reduction but rather an increase in forces. According to our monitoring of the movement of forces, that is not the case. I had discussions myself in Wau with the authorities who also expressed some concerns and who came with some specific evidence, we are investigating all the complaints.

There are movements of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) within the South from one place to another in order to move out; you can say that in particular Juba is an assembly point.

We are monitoring the whole process and decided to be 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in all the airports and we also curtailed the possibilities for night landing. Also, to be present in other places around Juba, not only the airport, because there were allegations at certain moments by people, that the SAF will come by barge.

We are investigating everything at the moment, but we don't really have evidence that there is a violation. But the date, still somewhere I think in February, it's the date upon which we shall come with calculations as such.

Secondly, on the East; the SPLM has asked for assistance for redeployment of forces. They have received the agreed-on necessary financial resources from the Government. The SPLA has admitted they have received financial resources.

Secondly, the major redeployment of 1500 forces also with heavy weapons took place a couple of months ago without any preannouncement even, and without any support.

Both the UN and Government have said to SPLM if you could do it last time without requesting support, why can't you do it this time? Anyway, some ad hoc support is always possible but the redeployment, either of SAF or of SPLA, has not been made conditional in the CPA on international financial or logistical support, it's just a CPA obligation. Thank you.

Q: What do you think of the rejection by the Congress of the Libyan mediation? Because, some (people) claimed that Eritrea knows better the nature of the conflict in Sudan than Libya?

A: The suggestion made by some people in the Eastern Front that Eritrea would be a mediator is not new. It has been done before. And a mediator has to be agreed upon by both parties otherwise you can not mediate. At the moment, we as UN, we only watch. We have been informed officially by the both parties, the Eastern front and the Government, that Libya would be the mediator. That meant our proposal was not acceptable by either one of the two parties. So at the moment we are only watching and looking. We have not received any new information. We only got information from the representative of the Bija Congress that they felt that they could not go for Libya anymore. What I have said now is: please talk, be united, do not postpone, be serious, because the situation may become very unstable. According to the CPA, and this is necessary, SPLM would leave. That's why we had offered to be involved, because we have an interest in both processes; the peace process and also in the good implementation of the CPA. But the parties did not think that the UN should be involved in that. We can only mediate if we are being asked by both parties, otherwise you can not mediate.

Q: (Khartoum Monitor) Specifically, I have two questions. The first is about what was said (about) the organized return. Some said that the UN had said the organized return would be done generally; is that possible? And when will it exactly begin? The second question is regarding the deployment of the UN peacekeepers; it was also said that the deployment would be done generally, some 50% were already deployed, but when will this finish?

A: You are quite right; I didn't say generally, but in 2006 the new policy with regard to the return will start not only facilitating voluntary return but also organizing it. The degree and the level of the organization will depend on the financial resources, because return also requires assistance. That's the reason why I came with my appeal to the international community. It's a bit early now, because the appeal was raised only at the end of November, to say that we will have adequate resources to go for a fully organized return. I hope I will be able to organize very soon an overall meeting within the (UN) house on the policy for this year to give information about the contents of the policy for this year and within the next couple of years.

On deployment I must say exactly the same thing, it will be premature at the moment to give you figures. Because we have specific dates, and those are the calculation bases, the process towards a specific deadline is less important than the deadline itself. I did say very cautiously, it will be difficult, given the process so far, to meet the deadline. The parties have promised to meet the deadline. And if they do not, then there is a violation of the CPA. Can I add to this that now we have started to come up with a monthly implementation bulletin of the CPA, and the first issue will be made public within a couple of days; before the 9th of January. It will be available publicly also to you. And (it) will come up with a monthly survey of all the elements of the implementation of the CPA, and it will be available on line, so you can have access to it.

(Acting Spokesperson) I just want to mention that our colleague from WFP has just mentioned a note saying that WFP is feeding 87,000 people in the East, who are receiving full rations. And there are 500 who are not yet receiving full rations, who have arrived recently.

Note: This was in response to the SRSG's comment that he had met refugees in the East who were only receiving half rations.

Any other questions for Mr. Pronk?

Q: I would like to ask about the voluntary homecoming of refugees from Cairo; I am asking about the conditions of the Sudanese refugees in Cairo and who are supposed to be returned by the Egyptian authorities in two days?

A: UNCHR informed me yesterday that they had been informed about people, who would be returned, and they are taking precautions in order to receive them. But people did not come yesterday. I do not know at the moment when people are going to be returned, but UNHCR anyway is preparing also some activities in order to help receiving returning refugees here. So far people have not yet returned. There is different information from Cairo about how many. And when people are returning.

Q: (Sudan Radio Service) My first question is about the UN stance in Sudan towards the tragedy that took place in Cairo a few days ago. Because I have not heard any thing from the

UN in Sudan, and no any statement was released condemning the brutality of the Egyptian authorities against the Sudanese refugees in Cairo. It is as if the UN in Sudan appreciated what happened in Cairo? In addition, we want a clarification from the UN on the conditions of refugees in Cairo, since the UN was said to be involved in the incidents because it called the Egyptian police to come and disperse the refugees? There were some 600 refugees who were said to have traveled to Khartoum, but they neither arrived in Khartoum nor know where they are? And what the UNHCR in Cairo did when the incident took place? The UN was supposed to take a stance, but they did nothing? Because this may affect the peace in Sudan.

A: Thank you Sir. I think I read a statement given by the Government of Sudan about the lives of their own people in Cairo. So, I think you are mistaken when you say that the Government of Sudan did not comment on the lives of its own people. Number two; I do not know where you were at the beginning of this meeting. Because after I had expressed my best wishes for the New Year, I gave my condolences, but you disregarded it. Thirdly, I think that you may know that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who is higher than me, made a very strong statement. And when the Secretary-General of the United Nations does so, he does so also on my behalf. And sometimes the SRSG in a country requests an even more important statement by the SG himself rather than doing it only in the country itself. So please try to interpret a couple of facts with more benefits than you did. As far as the facts are concerned, I just do not know. I hope there will be a full investigation, but I'm not in a position to ask for such investigation because my area of competence is Sudan and not Chad, nor Eritrea, nor Ethiopia, nor Cairo. I hope that there will be such an investigation also because there are also new accusations. Whether such accusations are correct or not, it has to be investigated. And I do not know anything about the 600 people you mentioned. I just gave you an answer. UNHCR went to the airport, but people did not come. And of course UNHCR as the concerned agency, with which I had discussions yesterday, did directly try to get more information about the people, which they have not yet received. Our responsibility is to help the Government to take care of people returning. The UN in Cairo is to get in touch with the UNHCR there to take care of the people there, and as the UN in New York is to guide us and steer us to do the jobs each in their area of competence. Thank you.

(Recording ends)