

**The United Nations Mission In Sudan****Date: 18 January 2006****Office of the Spokesperson****PRESS BRIEFING**

Good afternoon ladies and Gentlemen.

Our guest today is Colonel Parminder Pannu, the Military Chief of Staff for UNMIS. He is here to brief you on the latest deployment of the military and to answer any questions you may have on UNMIS military matters.

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ON DARFUR

In an encounter with the press following the 12 January Security Council luncheon, the Secretary-General of the UN noted that the Council's main topic at that meeting was the deteriorating situation in Darfur. He noted that not long ago humanitarian agencies were feeding a million people in Darfur. Now, he said, we are feeding three million people and we may have to do it for another year. Secondly, Mr. Annan stressed that the Abuja peace process needs to be energized, because the long-term solution lies only at the negotiating table. The immediate need, he noted, is to improve security on the ground. He appealed for further logistical and financial support for the AU, to enable security to be improved. The Secretary-General stressed that both parties are contravening the ceasefire agreement, and he said that the Security Council will follow the issue very closely.

Speaking of the funding difficulties faced by the AU Mission in Darfur, Mr. Annan noted that the international community cannot allow that situation to go unaddressed, and will have to look at other options, including possibly the UN working with the AU to address the situation. The UN, he said, has already started contingency planning for such an eventuality.

U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL

On Friday 13 January the Security Council held consultations following presentations by the SRSG, Jan Pronk, and Salim Ahmed Salim, the AU Special Envoy and Chief Negotiator for the Darfur conflict. In summing up the consultations, the Council President noted three main points: the need to reinvigorate and inject a sense of urgency into the Abuja peace process, including through the use of possible sanctions; the need to resource and equip AMIS according to the recommendations made in the AU assessment mission report; the need for the Security Council to address the issue of a UN transition, its conceptual considerations and political, technical and procedural matters.

ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION AND ITS SENIOR LEADERSHIP

The SRSG, Jan Pronk has been traveling in New York and Washington and he is today in Brussels. He will return to Sudan at the end of the week. In New York, the SRSG participated

in Security Council consultations on Sudan. A copy of his statement to the Council, and a summary of his subsequent press conference have been made available to you. The SRSG made it clear to the Council that the international community must put sustained pressure on the parties to achieve a peace agreement during the current 7th round of the Abuja talks. This can only be achieved through coordinated efforts by the international community, including the regional players. He also noted that humanitarian assistance to the people of Darfur needs to be sustained at the same levels as 2004-5. He noted the current bleak prospects for financial support to humanitarian efforts for this year.

Over the weekend and on Monday, Mr Pronk was in Washington where he met with officials of the World Bank, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick, and officials from the National Security Council and the White House. In all these meetings he discussed issues pertinent to Sudan including Darfur and relations between Sudan and Chad. In Brussels today, Mr. Pronk is briefing NATO, at their request, on the same issues.

The Principal Deputy SRSG, Mr Taye Zerihoun, participated in the AU Peace and Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa. The Council discussed the continuing role of AMIS in Darfur, and examined the issue of a possible transfer of peacekeeping duties from AMIS to the UN, should such a decision be taken.

MILITARY UPDATE

Force Commander Designate, Lt. General Jasbir Singh Lidder from India arrived in Khartoum on 10 January. He will assume command of UN peacekeeping troops on 28 January, relieving Major-General Fazle elahi Akbar from Bangladesh, who has commanded UNMIS troops since 24 March last year.

A Joint Monitoring Team comprising the UN, the Sudan Armed Forces and SPLA observers has been deployed in Hamish Koreib to monitor the situation. The team has confirmed that there is no Beja militia activity in the Durun Durun and Telkuk areas.

The Ceasefire Joint Military Committee (CJMC) met yesterday in Juba. They discussed a number of issues including the redeployment of troops from the South to the North, the formation of Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) and the alleged ceasefire violation in Hamish Koreib. On the latter issue, the CJMC recommended that in view of the failure by the SPLA to meet the timeline for redeployment from the East, the SAF and the SPLA should take a joint decision on a new date for the SPLA's withdrawal, which will take place under UN monitoring and verification.. It was noted that the SAF has the right to move into the area when the SPLA withdraws. Until that time the SPLA should provide security to civilians and UNMOS in the area until their withdrawal.

Deployment of Military Observers and Protection Force elements continued during the past week. There are now 539 UN Military Observers in the country out of a planned UNMO strength of 750. Other force elements from Troop Contributing Countries now stand at a total of 4756 out of a planned total of 8909. Total UNMIS military presence in Sudan stands now at 5451 out of a planned total of 9836.

The advance party of a Kenyan company arrived in Rumbek on 10 January, consisting of three officers and 47 other ranks. Kenyan Force Protection troops along with logistical support units from China and Pakistan will be deployed in the Wau sector.

SECURITY

The Security situation in West Darfur remains tense. An inter-agency security assessment of the area around Geneina is ongoing. The reinforcement of Chadian and SAF forces on both sides of the border is continuing. Incidents of banditry in West Darfur have reduced, but there have been some attacks on commercial and NGO vehicles in the past week.

In South Darfur there is continuing banditry. Buses and commercial vehicles contracted to International NGO humanitarian agencies have been attacked, while the situation in North Darfur remains relatively quiet.

In southern Sudan, anti-tank mines were discovered, one on the Juba-Yei road and one on the Gogrial to Wau road. The UN Mine Action Organization (UNMAO) has declared the Juba-Yei road a no-go area for the UN, limiting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In the East, the security situation around Hamish Koreib remains fluid. Reports last week of attacks by up to 700 SAF forces have not been confirmed by the Joint Monitoring Team (UN, SAF, SPLA). There are reports of the presence of militia in the hills surrounding the town. The issue was discussed at yesterday's meeting of the CJMC in Juba.

HUMANITARIAN

UNICEF will be producing a nutrition bulletin on a monthly basis. The first copy is made available to you today. It presents the nutritional situation across Darfur from September to December 2005.

In Hamish Koreib, the humanitarian actors still have not gained access to the area to assess the humanitarian situation. A Humanitarian Emergency Response Plan is in place should it be required.

The two INGOs that have a regular presence in Hamish Koreib have been unable to operate since 11 January. The Sudanese Red Crescent has advised that there is enough food in the area until the end of the month, but after that additional support would be required.

George Somerwill (Deputy Spokesperson): Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen; those are the main points for the Press Briefing of today. Now let's move ahead to any questions you may have on issues that have come up either in the briefing here or on any other issues which you may have to our guest Colonel Parminder Pannu.

Q & A

Q: My question is to Colonel Parminder Pannu, UNMIS Military Chief of Staff; would you consider what happened in Hamishkoreib as a ceasefire violation as the SPLA has said? And would you give us more details of what you saw when you went there?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) Good morning ladies and gentlemen; the issue at Hamishkoreib dates back to the signing of the CPA, which specifies that the SPLA troops should move down South of line 1-1-56 by the 9th January. We have UNMIS presence in Kassala in the entire sector to oversee the implementation of the CPA. However, the date of

9th January 2006 has well passed, and we did not get any indication or reports, but have been asking the SPLA that they should have conformed to the understanding that to move the troops south, but they have not done it. On the 10th January, we were monitoring the situation, and we got indications that there was attack launched on the Eastern Front Beja Congress by the SAF, and immediately the CJMC was called to order in Kassala. On the 11th January, SPLA gave a written complaint to the UN that a battalion supported by three tanks had attacked Beja Congress. Based on that a Joint Military Team was sent to Hamishkoreib. We have a Joint Monitoring Team present ever since there the 12th January, and that the First Commander also visited – along with CJMC – the area on the 15th January. Between the 12th January and 15th January a lot of indications came to us, and our team, including ourselves, also made a visit there. There was no SAF attack seen by us monitored, or verified, but – as the SAF described to us – there was a force called the PDF had come and gone over occupying the mountains western Hamishkoreib. The JMT was there on the date on which the so called attack had taken place, but I believe there was some projectile exchange between the Beja Congress – who were located on the Eastern side of the village – and the PDF. Reportedly two girls in the Quranic School were injured. The JMT tried to see the girls, but due to traditions they did not get an access to that. Therefore, this information remains still unverified, because the two girls were not seen by the JMT. The PDF continues to hold their positions on the Western hills of Hamishkoreib, the SPLA is located inside the town of Hamishkoreib, and the Beja Congress is located in the East – approximately 20 kilometers away – and their position was verified on the ground and we met their military leader (Musa) there. And we found that, as regard to the complaint submitted by SPLA, there was no visibility of any tanks there. So the situation as on date is calm, however tense. Because all the forces, the SPLA, the Beja Congress, and the PDF are all actually facing each other in Hamishkoreib area; with the town in the middle of them. And there are SAF movements of troops also reported behind the PDF's location.

Q: My question is this: Has there been a ceasefire violation?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) Yes, there was a ceasefire violation. Because, when you cease fire, you do not fire. And as the parties complained, the PDF is supposed to be allied forces with SAF, and that SAF presence is also there along with the PDF. So according to the UN terminology there was a ceasefire violation.

Q: (BBC) How serious do you regard the situation in the east as a whole? Or is this only an isolated incident? Or is it an indication of more tension, which exists on a lot of basis whereby perhaps by time it can draw to more difficulty?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) The situation at this time is an isolated case; because the firing has actually taken place there. And the troops of SPLA and SAF are very close to each other, though there are no direct confrontations between these troops. Because it is the PDF which is actually in front of the SAF troops and the SPLA is right in the middle, and the Eastern Front is located in the Eastern side. So, really speaking, at the moment the situation is very tense, but there is no exchange of fire taking place.

Q: Exactly which party violated the CPA?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) Beginning with the complaint, the complaint was against the SAF. On the ground situation, and as this militia – PDF – has been described to us as aligned to SAF, it is an OAG under the alignment of SAF. So really speaking the violation

goes to both SAF – because according to the SAF explanation it is well passed the 9th January 2006 when the SPLA should have moved out, but the fact that the SPLA has not moved out. So, being very conscious of the fact that the SPLA is still there; any movement of forces without discussing this across the table and taking a universal decision with regard to it, it is considered a ceasefire violation.

Q: (Ahmed El-Sheikh, Al Ayaam) CPA specifies that militias should be disarmed, and then be reintegrated into the social community. However, up until now and with one-year has elapsed since signing the CPA, there is no disarmament done, particularly in South of Kurdfan. According to SPLA statement given in this connection, only the Nuba were disarmed, but actually the Arabs were not, and some slight confrontations were reported in Khour-Glif area as well as other ones; what the UNMIS stance in the connection? Because, this area may blow up at any time and, therefore, may come to terminate the agreement?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) when it comes to the question of commenting on militias, which we also call Other Armed Groups (OAG), it makes the whole situation very complex. For the reason that the number of other armed groups which are operating the South of Sudan, and in the area of ceasefire zone, we have 59 known groups, and we do not know if there are some more. Because as we is the process of gathering information, we continuously find that there are more splitting groups emerging and constantly changing back and forth their alignments. As on date, all OAGs have not been aligned to the parties. Because, the CPA mentioned in the first year, both parties should align these OAGs to their respective parties, and thereafter these AGOs should form part of the army as reintegrated units and then be put through redeployment as in the scheduled process.

As of this date, we still do not have the complete alignments declared, and therefore, with regard to all these that have yet not been declared; really speaking there is a question mark on that. For instance, there is the case of the status of SSDF; where initially there is a change in leadership, and there is a question now as to where the SSDF ultimately aligns itself, whether to move from North to South or vice versa. So it is a situation with respect to which we in the CJMC told the parties that they are to decide on the alignments very quickly, which was supposed be done by the OAG Collaborated Committee, which was to be formed. We have information that the OAG Collaborated Committee has been formed to take decisions on the positions of militias. But we have no visibility on the decisions taken by the Collaborated Committee, because they haven't actually convened a meeting and nothing has been conveyed to us. And we have told the CJMC that we want to have a visibility on the OAG Collaborated Committee's decisions. So, in absence of this committee's visibility we have decided to form an OAG Working Group in Juba, to give some visibility on the future of the militias which are not aligned; so the situation still remains not very clear. We are working on it, and we hope that the OAG Collaborated Committee will take decisions so as to be clearer as how the parties are going to proceed. In the meanwhile, the CJMC also has taken a decision with the two parties that the date of 9th January will be extended by two months, so that non-aligned militias could be aligned to two parties. Because there is no other option but to continue putting pressure on the parties to declare their alignments.

Q: (Ahmed El-Sheikh, AL Ayaam) My second question is about the status of Nuba mountains?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) The status of Nuba mountains we have the CJMC working there on behalf of UNMIS. Therefore, by the time the CJMC has been there a bit longer and that they have proceeded with the work for UNMIS. So therefore the work done by the CJMC obviously would mean that they would have proceeded with certain provisions under which they are operating, while in the rest of Sudan the CJMC of UNMIS started late.

Q: (Ahmed El-Sheikh, Al Ayaam) My third question is that the SPLA gave a statement that the UN had stated that – if asked -it would move the SPLA troops from the east to southern line of the 1956 boundaries, however SPLA said that it came to ask the UN to do so but it did nothing? Thank you.

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) The SPLA had to move out as at the 9th of January but they haven't. We have asked the government; in fact UN does not facilitate these movements. We have asked the Government of National Unity to give administrative support to SPLA to move out. The Government of Sudan has asked the SPLA to give them details about what assistance they want from the Government of Sudan. The SPLA has yet to give them a program and the exact requirements to shift the troops. So really speaking the Government of Sudan is awaiting response from the SPLA to give a program of movement and exactly what assistance they require, and that the Government of Sudan has committed to give possible assistance required to the SPLA for the redeployment.

(George Somerwill): On that issue I would just like to add something; you will remember two weeks ago when the SRSG Mr. Pronk was here he referred specifically to that case and he mentioned that the SPLA had initially moved 1500 troops out of the East. And they have not at that point requested any administrative or financial support, but subsequently the SPLA did ask for administrative and financial support to withdraw the remaining troops. The CPA does not state that any body has to provide financial or administrative support, all it says is the troops should be moved. So, a message initially was passed to the SPLA saying that you managed to move the first 1500 troops why can you not move the rest? But as Col. Pannu has said, subsequently the Government has indicated that it might well be able to support.

Q: My question is that since it has been made clearly that CPA ceasefire had been violated; what are you going to undertake in this connection?

(George Somerwill): The situation is that, as Col. Pannu mentioned, things are remaining calm at this point in the area. And I think it is very important to note that and to remind everybody of that; that clearly the Joint Monitoring Team (JMT) is present, and they are watching very carefully what is going on. As the SRSG and others have said for along that the view of the UN is that peace must be maintained, and that talking and negotiation is much better than conflict. So clearly we will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that nothing further develops in the area and that the latest decision on the part of the CJMC as I mentioned to you in the briefing is that the SAF and SPLA will agree on a new dateline for the withdrawal of SPLA troops. So in that respect we can only continue to monitor the situation and make sure that nothing further develops.

Q: (BBC) Mr. Jan Pronk spent a lot of time last year speaking about a peace deal to be reached for before the end of the year in Darfur. However, so far no peace deal has been reached. What does this mean for Pronk's credibility? I mean he has misread the situation?

(George Somerwill): No, I can not say that necessarily means he has misread the situation. Not only Mr. Pronk, but the Chief Negotiator for the AU had both of them stressed, as indeed had the parties at one point, they had hoped to have agreement by the end of the year. Obviously when that did not happen, Mr. Pronk and the Chief Negotiator were extremely disappointed about it. But nevertheless the talks are going ahead. As Mr. Pronk stated to the Security Council and he also said in his press briefing two weeks ago that he would like to see the clock stopped at this point. He would want to have agreement reached by the end of the seventh round of the talks, which have just started now in Abuja on the 15th. I think that you have to set a deadline, when you are negotiating these things. I think you do not want – as a negotiation tactic – to leave such things open-ended. And I think that Mr. Pronk was encouraging and pushing the parties to reach a decision by the end of the year, but that did not happen, and he has indicated very clearly subsequently that he was very disappointed about it.

Q: (Juana, BBC) Because we were told that Mr. Jan Pronk kept last year coming and going to Abuja and that he was not only an observer but a player as well; so we thought that parties could have listened to what he would tell them to do?

(George Somerwill): Well, I do not know whether you have been present in Abuja at all the rounds of discussion that have taken place, but I can assure you that he has been there and he has been a player. The talks process in Abuja, as you know, is run by the African Union, the Chief Negotiator is Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim. Mr. Pronk has been there and he has participated and I think if you want to find out what the parties and the AU Chief Negotiator specially think of the SRSG Pronk's participation, I think you should ask them. But I assure you that they will tell you that he has participated and made a very positive contribution.

Q: (Hamid Alnathir, MBC) My question is about the proposal given by Mr. Kofi Annan in relation to the deployment of UN international military forces in replacement of the AU forces in Darfur; the Government says that the question is not a question of AU forces' incompetence to provide security and peace to civilians in Darfur, but rather it is a question of lack of funding. How do you see this?

(George Somerwill): Thank you. I think the response to that must be that it is nothing to do with the ability of the AU to carry out its tasks in the area. And I think that has been made extremely clear by a number of parties, and subsequently in the Security Council, the AU has carried out its tasks; that was also reiterated by Condoleezza Rice the other day. It has carried out its tasks absolutely to the best of its ability. However, it has also been acknowledged that there is a need for probably larger numbers of troops, and also for more sophisticated equipment. So certainly the answer to the second part of your question is that it has nothing to do with failure on the part of the African Union. But the main need as I said is for a larger number of troops, and probably for more sophisticated forces.

Q: (Hamid Alnathir, MBC) OK; then why the UN is insisting on the deployment of international forces since as you said the issue is an issue of equipment, is it not possible to provide the AU with the required funding to continue undertaking the mission?

(George Somerwill): The situation at the moment is that the United Nations and the African Union are going to speak further on this. The DSRSG Zerihoun attended the AU Peace and Security Council's meeting that was held 10 days ago in Addis Ababa and we are now

waiting, as we agreed in that meeting, to hear from the AU about what modalities will take place. The decision is up to the AU, and they have indicated that in principle they accept the idea of a multi-national force. However, we are waiting for further consultation with the AU and we expect those to take place probably after the meeting of Ministers this week and the meeting of Heads of States next week, we expect those discussions to take place between the AU and the UN. As to exactly what form any kind of transition will take. But at the moment it is entirely up to the AU and they are continuing with their job at the moment.

Q: Mahjoub Outhman, Al Akhbar) My question is to Col. Pannu; you said that there was a ceasefire violation in Hamishkoreib which was the responsibility of the SAF, but you also said that SAF – based on the investigation carried out by your part – was not evidenced to have violated the ceasefire. So, if both SPLA and SAF were not convicted of ceasefire violations, who are the principal two parties that signed the ceasefire agreement; having in mind that any third party is not to be included in this connection. So what are the facts that on basis of which you came to condemn the SAF?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) When I say SAF it is very difficult to differentiate between the militia used and aligned with SAF and the SAF forces. On ground the PDF and SAF troops are so located that they are actually on the same mountain. And the PDF was said to be the militia that is aligned to the SAF. So there is the deduction of connectivity rather than direct involvement of troops. And also to clarify this issue further, the day the attack was reported, the JMT was dispatched to Hamishkoreib, and they have taken at least 24 hours to reach there, and the JMT has actually not been able to see the actual attack taking place. So really speaking the time the attack was reported, and the time the JMT reached there, there was a gap of about 24 hours. And therefore, what was seen on the ground after 24 hours was that the DPF had actually captured or moved in the area which dominated Hamishkoreib. And upon investigation with SPLA and the PDF, it was understood that clearly the PDF has actually come in. and yesterday our observers also met the SAF officers and troops that are located in close to PDF, exactly behind them. So really speaking, the two forces are not directly facing each other but using somebody else as a proxy, it becomes very difficult to really go by the terminologies. But we have to make deductions to ensure that there is no more violence and there is no outbreak of hostilities, because this will lead to hostilities; and hostilities will clearly create a serious security problem for the residents of Hamishkoreib. So unless the UN intervenes, which it has, the situation will go from bad to worse, and there will be a direct clash. So really speaking the JMT is at the moment interposing between the two forces. Because the fact that the PDF is also there and about 200 to 300 yards there is the SPLA, and then there are the militias, and these militias are aligned. So when you start talking about the context of SAF it has to be seen from the context of alignment and its position on the ground and what can be proved.

Q: Mahjoub Outhman, Al Akhbar) OK: the PDF is an integrated part of SAF, and that when UNMIS came once to name the PDF by the word “militia”, the SAF clarified the matter saying that the PDF is a part of it, and that UNMIS had to apologize for it. What I meant to say is that there are other armed forces in Hamishkoreib area, so it could be one of these OAGs that violated the ceasefire. So it is unfair to have SAF condemned for committing a ceasefire violation on deduction basis, whereas it could have been done by another party?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) Let me clarify the issue; the JMT is still continuing its efforts. But if we go to details of the CJMC, the SAF also declined any link with the forces there, and also said that the people who were supposed to be PDF are only armed civilians

and that happened only yesterday. So really speaking with these allegations and counter allegations and clarifications, it is still going on, it is really very difficult to state that this is it, because the investigation is still going and the situation is very quickly changing on the ground.

Q: Mahjoub Outhman, Al Akhbar) But in fact you came to make the SAF directly responsible for a ceasefire violation?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) I would like to clarify the issue here that initially when the report came the Force Commander had spoken to the authorities here and they said; “OK, we will withdraw”. This one indication alone is that if the violation has not taken place, then the commitment of “withdrawal” is something that becomes questionable. Because, unless you got in how you would make a commitment to withdraw?

The second thing is that when the SAF is objecting to this as not a violation, because they are supporting these people if they are fighting for a cause, it became a legitimate thing because they are supporting their cause. So these are other indications that another thing is happening on the ground at the moment and the CJMC is constantly feeding us with reports.

Q: Mahjoub Outhman, Al Akhbar) Has this been the first ceasefire violation since last year?

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) When you start talking about violations, these are against the ceasefire, when you open fire, it is seen as a serious violation. Well there have been violations of the CPA, the SPLA has not moved out from Hamishkoreib by the 9th of January; this is a violation. So when you talk about violations in this area, the SPLA has made a violation by not committing to the CPA, which has led us to the current situation there.

Q: (Yasir Awadallah, Alwihda Newspaper) The situation suddenly deteriorated very rapidly within the SSDF; between Paulino Matip and other commanders. There are specific threats given by the two parties to the extent that Paulino (as given in Alwihda newspaper yesterday) asked UNMIS to provide protection to his properties in Khartoum which is being threatened by the militias, and that now the UN forces are guarding the house of Paulino in Khartoum. In the meanwhile, there are mutual threats of warring given by both parties. How will you address this issue?

(George Somerwill): I think that the short answer to your question, first of all, is that of course there was tension last week. But I think that it is important to understand that the situation remains calm overall. This is the first element that I would say. Secondly, this is a situation which needs to be resolved between the parties in the South. As you know there is a South-south dialogue, which is taking place. This is a part of that dialogue. That dialogue needs to continue. And the United Nations of course is prepared to facilitate and assist that South-South dialogue taking place. We have indeed already done that, and we are prepared to do it again. But in the end the UN does not have a view, it is simply a question of this dialogue taking place, and as I said we are prepared to facilitate that.

Q: As the Darfur rebels had said that they were ready to talk with AU to facilitate the conversation; does the UN see that if that the rebels come down to talk with AU after the Summit, will it be damaging to the peace process in Darfur?

(George Somerwill): I do not think that is appropriate at this time for the UN to express an opinion, it is an issue for the African Union; the Council of Ministers are meeting now, the Heads of States are meeting next week, and it is up to them to decide. It is certainly not appropriate for me or for the UN to comment at this time.

Before we proceed with further questions, Col Pannu has some comments to say to you on Hamishkoreib.

A: (Colonel Parminder Pannu) Since the questions on Hamishkoreib were raised bit by bit and so were the answers; here I would like to say that the CJMC yesterday had deliberated on the issue of Hamishkoreib at length with both parties present there. The UN was explaining that the PDF has actually come and forcefully occupied the eastern portion of Hamishkoreib and that was the time that the SAF completely disassociated themselves from the PDF saying that it was an armed civilian group. This was something which happened only yesterday. And also the clarification that they are giving is that the SAF build-up, which is taking place along with the PDF – as they called it, an armed group of civilians - is basically to control this group from not undertaking further offensives. So really speaking it is a sort of question that is being discussed and it is raising arguments and counter arguments that are going back and forth. At the moment the JMT is seeing this matter on ground, and it is reporting to CJMC and the CJMC is discussing it with the parties. Therefore, I do not want to draw a final line here, because the outcome will be seen in the future as how things would progress from here on. Because if SAF is disassociating themselves from a group that was initially called PDF by them, and now is being called armed civilians, this should be studied a little more on the ground situation, but the description of events I have already stated clearly.

Q: (Adel Alsiraj, Al Sahafa) The African Union has recently stated that it is encountering a US \$ 160 million deficit in Darfur as at forthcoming month of March, whereas the UN Secretary-General said that the AU in Darfur will need support until be replaced by the UN in March. My question will the UN replace the AU completely by end of March? Or will this be done gradually?

(George Somerwill): As I mentioned earlier the issue here is that it is a decision which the African Union and the United Nations will talk about. Those discussions, those talks have not yet taken place, except some initial discussions at the Peace and Security Council's meeting. We are waiting to hear from the AU as what steps they want to take to begin to resolve this issue. We are expecting that we will hear from them as when the discussion between the UN and AU will take place, following the meeting of the Council of Ministers and the meeting of the African Union's Heads of States next week.

In the meantime, as the Secretary-General mentioned, and also Mr. Pronk mentioned in New York last week, in the meantime it will be very irresponsible of the UN not to start contingency planning. Because, as you probably understand and may probably know, to set up a modern peacekeeping operation requires a tremendous amount of logistical and sheer practical efforts. Everything from getting troops in, getting equipments in, getting vehicles in, all of these things have to take place. It takes along time to do that. So clearly the UN has started contingency planning in the event that there is a UN involvement in the peacekeeping forces in Darfur. But the discussion with the AU will take place probably in the coming week to 10 days.

Q: (Adel Alsiraj, Al Sahafa) One more question please; the African Union declared that it is encountering a financial deficit up until next March, which may hinder implementation of its duties in Darfur. What are the UN practical actions and procedures - taking into account the current worsening situation in Darfur - to meet the needs against any emergency that will arise on ground until March?

(George Somerwill): Well, clearly the funding issue is an issue which needs to be discussed by the AU and the donors. The UN can facilitate that; we can put individual donors in touch with the AU in case the discussions have not already taken place if there are new contributions which are going to be coming in. But this is an issue which at the moment needs to be discussed between the AU and its donors. However, as I said, following the discussions that will take place, as I believe, in the next 10 days between the UN and the AU, at that point we will discuss with the AU how we can assist, and how we can facilitate this process. But at the moment those discussions have not yet taken place, and therefore it is not appropriate for me to comment or to speculate what may come out of those discussions. But what you need to do is to keep watching and keep listening and of course when we have information we will give it to you.

No more questions? Thank you very much for attending.

Note: Humanitarian information included in UNMIS briefings is provided by OCHA and the UN Agencies, Funds, Programmes operating in Sudan.