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*Below is a near verbatim transcript of the Press Conference by the Director, UNMIS Political Affairs Department, **Abiodun Bashua** held on 07 March 2007 at UNMIS Press Briefing Room, Ramsis Building - Khartoum.*

George Somerwill, Chief PIO

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for coming. We are following your suggestion made the last time, to have the press briefing on Sunday and we'll try to do so also in the future.

After the briefing we'll share with you a couple of hand outs including the Secretary-General's latest report on Darfur which is also available on the UN and UNMIS website.

I'd like to introduce to you the Director of the UNMIS Political Affairs Department Abiodun Bashua who is actively involved in the support that UNMIS is providing to AMIS. He's going to give us a short presentation as he has to rush to another meeting soon. Then we'll throw the floor open for questions. Without further ado let me hand you over to Mr. Bashua.

Abiodun Bashua

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the press. The Acting SRSG could not be with us for today's press briefing because of some other exigencies. As George mentioned, in deference to your wishes we have agreed to hold the press conference every Sunday. The focus of our briefing today will be on the collaboration between UN and AU, particularly in relation to the Darfur crisis. I'll brief you on where we are on the Tripartite Mechanism as well as the Joint Support Team of the AU and UN which was established to facilitate the work of the two special envoys: Jan Eliasson, the UN Special Envoy and Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, the AU Special Envoy.

You know that several meetings on the Tripartite Mechanism were held with the UN, the AU and the Government of Sudan, the last one being on Wednesday, 7 March. With regard to the Light Support Package, we have deployed to Darfur 34 Military Staff officers and four more will be deployed in the coming days, bringing the total Military staff officers to 38. We have deployed 32 Police Advisors and we have also deployed 23 civilian personnel. In other words the Light Support Package (LSP), which is the first of the three phases, is on course.

Regarding the work of the two special envoys, as the ASRSG stated to you at the last briefing, a Task Force has been established comprising officials from the UN and AU, called the Joint Mediation Support Team. The work of this team is to continue the

consultations and discussions with all stakeholders on how to gain a speedy implementation of the renewed political process. Dr Salim and Mr. Eliasson will be back in Sudan in the last week of this month. Between the last time they were here and now, a lot of work has been going on, on their behalf. We held discussions with a number of national stakeholders within Sudan. We also traveled to Chad to meet some of the DPA non-signatories who are there.

While Dr Salim and Mr. Eliasson will visit Sudan towards the end of the month, Mr. Eliasson has been invited by the Eritrean President to visit Asmara...he'll undertake the visit before their next visit to Khartoum.

I do not have much more to add. Thank you.

George Somerwill

Thank you Mr. Bashua.....Now let us throw the floor open to questions.

Q: Egyptian Nile T.V channel:

Two questions:

The first question is regarding the tripartite support packages, there are news circulating now that there is disagreement between the AU, UN and the Government of Sudan. There is also news of a plan of the African Union and the UN to deploy 19,000 soldiers in Darfur, which is rejected by the Government... that is for the third package. We would like your comment on that....Specially regarding the heavy support package (HSP).

The second question, There is a decision taken by the UN to potstone its humanitarian operations in western Darfur. What is the reason for that?

Abiodun Bashua

Thank you for the question. I think there is some misunderstanding here. The Tripartite Mechanism was set up by the African Union, UN and the Government of Sudan for two purposes:

The first is to enable the UN and the AU to inform the Government of Sudan of all the support that the UN is providing to AMIS in a transparent manner.

The second purpose of the tripartite mechanism was to help clarify and resolve any disagreement that might occur during the implementation of the support package between the AU and UN partners and the Government of Sudan. The tripartite mechanism is not and does not discuss policy issues; the mechanism is there to facilitate the implementation of the three phases of the support.

We are now on the light support package, we move on from there to the heavy support package and, hopefully, to the last phase of the package.

So the tripartite mechanism is not discussing policy issues and disagreement on political or military matters. Thank you.

George Somerwill:

Your second question: if I understood correctly you wanted to know about the suspension of the humanitarian aid in and around Al Jenaina. Let me make it very clear, this is not the case. What happened on Wednesday afternoon is that there was a raid and Ardamata camp, near Jeneina was surrounded by Arab militia who were pursuing some of those whom they believed were responsible for the death of one of their family members. They surrounded the camp, they found the man, they wanted to take him to the police station. The police in fact intervened, but they said that they did not wish to leave the man with the police. They however took him to the SAF security post and they left him there. But the militia remained around the [Ardamata camp] as a result of which there was a temporary suspension for a few hours, only a temporary suspension of the work of the NGOs in the [Ardamata camp]. As of the following day, that is last Thursday morning, work had returned to normal. So as of last Thursday humanitarian work at [Ardamata camp] has continued with no problems.

So please understand the headline in today's media is not correct, we have not suspended our work around Al Jenaina or in West Darfur. Thank you.

Q: Aljazeera Channel:

The Director says that he does not talk about political issues, while he is the Director of Political Affairs, how could that be? As for the support package, it is a basic issue for us as journalist.

There are real disagreements between the Government and UN over these packages especially the third one. President Bashir sent a letter to the Secretary General. What is the content of this letter?

There is some information that has been leaked from that letter, that the Sudanese Government has accepted the deployment of international forces according to news coming from the Secretary General's office. But the Government has refuted that...It seems there are real differences. As for the situation in Darfur, we would like to know what is going on there. There are two African Union soldiers who were killed in Gereida.

Abiodun Bashua

Thank you. As a director of political affairs in UNMIS I deal with political issues every day and every minute. The question I was asked was whether the tripartite mechanism was resolving the issue of the number of troops in the support package and my answer was very clear. The Tripartite Mechanism is not meant to resolve political issues, the Tripartite Mechanism is set up to help in showing transparently the UN cooperation in support of the African Union, and also to resolve disagreements and problems that might occur in the implementation of that package. That is why the tripartite mechanism is between the African Union, UN and the Government of Sudan.

Regarding the letter of President Bashir, as you know the letter was received late last week in New York. We have not received officially that letter here because the letter was transmitted to the UNSG through the Sudanese ambassador in New York.

The letter has an attachment of about ten or so pages annexed, which is in Arabic, which I understand is being translated and studied in New York. We will get the letter and the attachments in the coming week. We will be able to provide clarification for that in the coming briefing or before, as is necessary.

Let me be very clear here, there are three phased package of support from the UN to the African Union, as agreed at the meeting held in Addis Ababa in November 16 2006.

Those decisions were endorsed at the AU-PSC summit in Abuja on 30 November 2006 and the subsequent statements, convinced us that the government of Sudan is committed to work together with us on the three phases.

The death of two AU soldiers in Darfur remains a worrying concern. There have been 11 African Union deaths in Darfur since the mission began. We condemn this in very strong terms and we find it difficult to believe how an African Union peacekeeping mission which is sent to Darfur to help in the peace process, and bring peace and stability to Darfur, can be targeted like this. They remain the targets of some of the people who claim they represent the interests of those that they were sent there to protect.

It is condemnable by any standard, and we can only hope that such attacks on the AU will cease completely.

George Somerwill:

Thank you very much, Mr. Bashua. Any more questions?

Q: AlSahafa

According to the first support package, the UN is supposed to deploy 105 officials, but till now there are only 38 officials deployed.

How can the UN talk about international forces to Darfur while it is unable to complete the first support package?

We would like, first of all, to know why the rest of the officials have not been deployed till now.

Abiodun Bashua

That is a very interesting question. Let me do some explanation here. The UN depends on the will of member states in every thing that it does. The light support package provided for 105 military staff officers, 33 police advisers and 48 civilian staff. In all of this, and again in reference to the Government of Sudan, we have relied on the African Union member states and other TCCs being able to provide these personnel.

If the UN is not yet able to deploy more than 38 of the 105, it's because the member states have not been able to provide those staff. We don't impose staff. We tell the member states that we need 105 officers, please give usand we take them. So it is not the UN. It is member states, particularly African Union member states. So if we still have only 38 of the 105 it is because we don't have the offer from the member states.

Q: Sudan Radio Service

From the letter of the President, it appears there are some elements which go against the agreement in Abuja...Also we know that the Secretary General will consult the Security Council (SC) on the next steps. This sounds ambiguous. What will be the possible strategy taken by the SC next time? On the other hand, the headlines in some Arabic papers say the SC has set June 2007 as the deadline for the solution to Darfur. How realistic is this?

Abiodun Bashua

This is a useful question. Like I said before, we've not formally received the letter of President Bashir here in Khartoum, and particularly the annexes which contain some of the concerns of his government. So I cannot comment faithfully on the contents of the letter.

Yes, what you read in the press is correct that the Secretary General will consult with the SC. That's the way it works...The Secretary General doesn't take decisions on his own...He reports to the SC...discusses it, and the decisions are then taken and transmitted to us. I don't think there's anything ominous about the procedure...That is what he has to do. That's the way it works in the UN System. I'm not aware that the SC or the UN has set a deadline of June 2007 for solving the Darfur crisis. If there's any lesson anybody would have learnt...it is that we don't set deadlines. We hope for a speedy reconvening of the political process...I was with an ambassador this morning who asked for an accelerated political process. Yes, we want these things to happen...because the longer it takes to solve the crisis the more you prolong the sufferings of the Darfurian people. We said to some of the non-signatories in Chad last week that everyday is another late day for the people of Darfur...The earlier we resolve the crisis the better it is for the people...who we all claim to be working for. There are however no deadlines set, and the SC will not set deadlines.

Q: Khartoum Monitor

The Secretary General who is 2 months and 10 days in office has written to the President regarding Darfur. This is the second letter, even before the first one has been replied to. What's your comment?

Abiodun Bashua

The two letters are not on the same issues. Like I said there are three phases of support from the UN to the African Union Mission. The first is the LSP which we are already implementing. The second phase is the heavy support package which is the subject of the letter from the Secretary General to the President. The reply which we got last week was to the letter written this year on January 24. ...The second letter is about the hybrid package. So it's not two letters on the same subject. They're connected in terms of being part of the same process...the package.

Q: Sudan Tribune: Some say the second phase is in contradiction with articles of the DPA.

Second, could it be that you first finish the first phase....before you start fighting for the second phase?

Abiodun Bashua

I repeat, we have not received President Bashir's letter in Khartoum. It's received in New York...is being studied and we'll get details in the coming week. And we'll comment on it at the next briefing ...maybe before, if necessary. So I cannot say whether that letter conflicts with the DPA, and the concerns expressed by the Government of Sudan.

On the second question, a lot of people find it strange. Let me explain. The LSP was agreed between the African Union and UN last September. The Government of Sudan came in late December to endorse it. And so, we have not been able to get member states to provide all the personnel we require....Now we are talking of the HSP which involves about 3000 military and police personnel...It takes some time for member states to provide all this because they have to take them from their countries' armed forces and police forces. So we are trying to speed up what needs to be done. Even if the HSP were to be approved today it will take some time to be implemented, because it will take member states some time to provide the staffing that we are talking about. So we're not rushing anybody. On the contrary we are trying to get the agreement of the Government of Sudan in order to persuade member states who are willing to be able to provide this support ... so we are not delayed. So it's not like we're trying to jump start before finishing one thing. Like I said the LSP of 105 persons is still being implemented.

On HSP if we get an early endorsement of the Government of Sudan we'll begin quickly to contact member states for the personnel, and implementation may take up to 3-4 months.