

Below is a near verbatim transcript of the Joint Press Conference by UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Darfur Jan Eliasson and African Union Special Envoy for Darfur Salim Ahmed Salim, held on 15 February 2007 at UNMIS Press Briefing Room, Ramsis Building - Khartoum.

UNMIS Spokesperson : Good evening everyone and thank you very much for coming to this press conference that is held jointly by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim the Special Envoy of the African Union for Darfur and Mr. Jan Eliasson the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Darfur as well. They are going to be briefing you on the joint mission which they have been undertaking in Sudan – Khartoum and Darfur. They have just arrived from Darfur.

Without further ado, I will give the floor to Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim who will be giving you his introductory remarks and will be followed by Mr. Jan Eliasson with his remarks as well.

Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim ...

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: Ladies and gentlemen, our joint mission has come about as a result of a decision originally taken at the meeting in Addis Ababa between the leadership of the UN and the leadership of the African Union, with the full participation of the members of the Security Council, a number of countries and institutions including the League of Arab States, and so on.

In that meeting which was co-chaired by Kofi Annan and Alpha Oumar Konaré, a number of things were agreed upon. One of the areas of agreement was the re-energizing of the political process in order to arrive to a political settlement to the conflict in Darfur. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had appointed a good friend, Mr. Jan Eliasson here, as a Special Envoy [for Darfur]. This appointment was confirmed by the new Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon. I was appointed by Chairman Konare as Special Envoy of the African Union.

This is our first mission together. We came here [to the press conference] after we had very interesting discussions in the last three days. We started here on Monday. We met with government officials here in Khartoum, we met literally with all the signatories of the DPA, and then we went to Darfur and spent the whole of yesterday and part of today in Darfur. We had a meeting with AMIS in Darfur. We also met with the field commanders [of DPA NON-signatories] somewhere under a tree – they call it a “peace tree” - in northern Darfur. We also met with representatives of IDPs and the representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). We met also with the tribal chiefs – some of them at least.

Our message throughout has been: One: we will do our utmost to re-engage the political process for the purpose of ensuring that there is an implementation of the existing agreement.

Secondly; bearing in mind the reservations [about the DPA], sometimes opposition to [the DPA], we will look into how we can take care of these reservations; how to overcome some of those difficulties, in order to propel the peace process forward.

We have come also at a time where there is a serious humanitarian concern as far as the situation of the operations of the humanitarian agencies that are operating in Darfur is concerned.

Throughout our visit, both in our discussions with the government leaders, our discussions with other signatories and in our discussions with the non-signatories, we have made it clear that this issue is one of the issues of primary concern for us; emphasizing to all stakeholders the importance of creating the necessary conditions for the humanitarian organizations to be able to operate in a manner which will be to the benefit of the people of Darfur but more particularly, to the benefit of people in the IDP camps.

We have stressed the importance of creating an enabling environment for the negotiations to take place. This enabling environment, *inter alia*, presupposes the de-escalation of the violence – the reduction of violence – and preferably the cessation of hostilities. We have made this point to all concerned, and I would like to say that thus far we have been encouraged by the initial reaction of everybody we met on this issue – the importance of de-escalation of violence - and also by the assurances by all the other parties that they will do the utmost to facilitate the operations of the humanitarian organizations.

But essentially our work is political. Our role is to create conditions for the resumption of dialogue between all the parties. Clearly we have not been able to meet all the parties yet. We have tried to focus on meeting all parties who are in Darfur and who are in Sudan. To that extent, we have succeeded. But there are others who we have not been able to meet and it is our intention, as part of our efforts, to make sure to reach out and meet all the other stakeholders, all the non-signatories.

We have been emphasizing that the most important thing to focus on is: what are those issues which are of particular concern to those who have not been able to come on board the peace process? And you know, when we go back to the history of the Abuja process, we had issues which were centrally discussed: the question of power-sharing, wealth sharing and the question of security arrangements. In our discussions whether with those who are signatories or with those who are opposed to the DPA, they made it very clear that they think that there are shortcomings and they highlighted a number of issues. For example the question of security and stability was highlighted everywhere we went. Another issue highlighted was the question of compensation - especially the measures to be taken to address the legitimate concerns of the IDPs, measures to be taken to deal with the issue of refugees and also the whole question of development and reconstruction was emphasized.

As I said before, this is just a first effort. Maybe I should also mention something else: we were encouraged by the positive attitude of everyone we have met showing particular appreciation that we were working as a joint team. The idea that the African Union and the UN are working together with one objective on this issue was highly appreciated and highlighted wherever we went, from the government side and also by the other stakeholders like, for example, the other signatories and the non-signatories. And I think this is important. I hope it marks the beginning of a continuation of a close working relationship between the UN and the African Union especially at a time when we are really faced with the challenge that confronts us in Darfur.

The final observation is that we really understand and recognize that time is of the essence; that we have to move with deliberate speed in our efforts. But we have to do so also through due deliberations. We have got to consult everybody, we have got to meet with everybody, we have got to know the preoccupations of everybody. We can not come with pre-fabricated solutions and say here we are and we think we have a solution to the crisis in Darfur. It is important to involve all the stakeholders and it is our intention to do so now because, as we

hold this press conference today, we are continuing with our meetings; we will have more meetings tomorrow and will have more meetings on Saturday, and after that we will decide also on a future course of action.

This is a joint press briefing and I would, of course, request my friend Jan Eliasson to say something. Thank you.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: Ladies and gentlemen, I am very proud to be at the side of Salim Ahmed Salim, a greatly respected African leader. And I think you should see the presence of a Special Envoy from the African Union and from the UN as a sign of the need for political mobilization; the need for mobilization of the political will, to finally bring this tragic conflict to an end. Four years of suffering is enough and we need now to send the signal and get concrete results of the negotiations process that we both are embarking in.

The Secretary-General gives the Darfur crisis the highest priority. He called me the first day when he took office [to discuss the Darfur situation]. He is personally deeply engaged [in the issue of Darfur]. The whole UN membership - 192 member States of the UN - follow this conflict closely and, of course most particularly, the 53 African members. We all are in this together. The Security Council follows this issue in particular very closely.

The impressions we had {from the meetings held by the two Envoys during their joint mission] have been described very eloquently by my dear friend Salim. I think it is evident after these rounds of talks that we had and which had been very thorough - for instance the discussions with Dr. Khalifa [Presidential Advisor] lasted three hours and were very detailed - that there is an acknowledgment that there is simply no military solution to the Darfur crisis. That's a starting point for the way forward and that is the political road.

We think that we are seeing now an engagement from those we have talked to enter in talks aiming at launching negotiations between the government and the different movements. We have expectations that once this political process starts – and it starts, I hope, now – there should and could be visible signs of a reduction in violence and improvement of the situation on the ground. This means that we want to connect the political talks we are embarking in with real progress on the ground. That is our expectation and that's what we consider a good way for the parties to prove that this is a serious venture, a serious enterprise, because as Dr. Salim just said, the situation is very serious. Four years of conflict of this nature is an enormous strain on the people. We have met the IDPs, the tribal leaders; we have met people who really represent those who take the beating. The humanitarian workers are exhausted. We heard from them clear expressions of fatigue, of frustration at the situation. And this is an enormous operation of 1 billion dollars a year with 13,000 humanitarian workers. But what they are actually doing is putting bandages over infected wounds. We would like and the world community would also like to use this money for health clinics, for education of the children, for irrigation projects, for the development of this region.

So there is an element of urgency and we think this is an opportunity that should not be missed by all concerned, particularly the parties to the conflict. This is a Sudanese problem and in the end it will have to be the people of Sudan and their representatives that will have to solve it. But we will do our utmost to bring this process about and we hope also that all actors, those who follow these developments very closely, those who are engaged in the region will cooperate with us. We have indications that this is the case; that those countries that are actively involved [in the Darfur issue]– like Eritrea – would like to work with us.

So we are on to an important process. We would need all the support we can get. But we hope that all concerned would realize that this opportunity is in their interest and make good use of it. A missed opportunity, again on Darfur – not building on what we have achieved and not taking the chance now to finally get this conflict behind us – will be a serious mistake. We don't want to end up with such a mistake.

Thank you very much.

Questions & Answers

Q: I have two questions, the first of which goes to Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim. Why did the African Union defend the Darfur Peace Agreement for about a year and then realized now that it has shortcomings? Does this mean that the Darfur Peace Agreement will be re-opened for negotiations?

The second question is to Mr. Eliasson. You said that all people you met welcomed your mission as a joint team of the African Union and the United Nations but there recent reports have it that the National Redemption Front, one of the largest fighting groups in the area, has refused to meet with the team because it believes that the African Union is not impartial and has said it will only meet with Eliasson and has also proposed that the meeting take place in Chad, amidst such a situation, how can the mission operate as a team?

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: The Abuja Agreement is a very important document. It is a result of strenuous efforts made by the African Union, supported by the United Nations and supported by a number of international partners. But it is not a perfect agreement; no agreement is perfect. The Abuja agreement is not like the Koran or the Bible that you can not change, you can not modify and so on. What is important as far as Abuja is concerned is that we have an agreement which we believe will provide peace. The reality on the ground is that one year later, peace has not yet been restored. And it has not been restored because there are some who are against the agreement; some who are reluctant to go along with the agreement. So the challenge is to try to find what the basis of their opposition is and that is what I have been trying to do. And I can tell you that in my discussions with the government, everybody understands that there is a need to look into what areas there can be an improvement in terms of the issues to be handled. For example; you know we were discussing about wealth sharing. Abuja provided for about 30 million dollars on the part of the government of Sudan. Even in Abuja there was a lot of dissatisfaction as far as this amount was concerned. We have been arguing since Abuja the importance of increasing that amount from 30 million dollars to something more generous. I have talked to the government of Sudan from the time I came last November; I mentioned it to the President, I mentioned it to his ministers. I told them that the government of Sudan can be more generous on the question of compensation. But not only that, we have got to think in terms of how we can mobilize the international community in support of this issue.

What I am saying is that we are – this mission – guided by the decision taken in Addis Ababa, endorsed in Abuja and supported by the United Nations insofar as the Abuja agreement is concerned. But we are also guided by some realism in terms of what we should do to make the agreement attractive; what can we do to ensure that people are on board, that peace is restored in Darfur, because the idea of any agreement is to restore peace. It is not simply to be satisfied on how good the agreement is.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: On the Darfur Peace Agreement, I note that from the government side there has been an openness to discuss amendments and improvements of the agreement. But as Dr. Salim says, the Darfur Peace Agreement is given to us in the Addis document of November 16th which is the basis of our work.

But I think we will be able to deal with the real issues during the talks. Compensation issues for instance came up as mentioned by Dr. Salim. I also hope that we will be able to deal with the issues of development so that there is a link between compensation, recovery and development. Many other issues that we discussed during our current joint mission can be handled on the basis of the Darfur Peace Agreement.

The second question was directed to me but I am sure that Salim, my dear friend, can comment on it as well.

We are working as a team. We are working as a very good team, I would say. We are happy to appear together and work together and we will, during this diplomatic mission, travel together. We may have a division of labor between us and we might have to work separately sometimes, but we are working and we will always be working as a team.

I was particularly happy during the meeting under the tree in North Darfur with the different SLA factions, to see how warmly Salim and I were received and how productive and constructive the discussions were. We also met today with the Justice and Equality Movement representative who also warmly welcomed contacts with both of us. We were simply discussing the best location for such contacts.

We have a strong preference – Salim and I – to work in Darfur. This problem is in Darfur; this problem is in Sudan. We want to have as much work done here as possible. It is not a coincidence that we have the representatives of AMIS and UNMIS here in the room today. We will try to work as much as possible with Darfur as our base and that is the reason why we couldn't get together with the representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement and some other groups during this visit (who are not in Darfur).

But I leave the floor to you Salim, in case you want to say something...

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: Well just to add the following and tell you what I said yesterday to the commanders in the field: if everyone wants to impose his or her own condition: "I will meet so and so only if you agree to do so; I will only enter into negotiations if the Darfur Peace Agreement is not considered"; and the other will say, "We will enter into negotiations only if the Darfur Peace Agreement is considered", we will not reach anywhere.

The Darfur Peace Agreement is a fact of life; it is there. The challenge now is to look at what are the issues. And we are going to operate on the basis of the issues identified. I will meet with those who want to meet me and those who don't want to meet me, I will say, "*Ahlan wa sahlan*" [*Arabic term for welcome; no problem*] ... it is not a problem.

But I think that the fact that we had today almost two hours of discussions with the representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement, I think is quite significant as far as I am concerned. But, really, we are a team of two [Salim/Eliasson]. Where I am not wanted for any reason because I represent the African Union and the African Union is not considered to

be sufficiently accepted, the United Nations is there. And that is why we have this combination [in the Salim/Eliasson team]. And sometimes we may go to places where the United Nations may not be wanted and I will be there. But at the end of the day it will be a joint effort.

Q: You mentioned that you said that the government has shown openness to discussions about amendments to Abuja. Can you clarify that? Has the government accepted that there will be amendments to the Abuja deal if there are new talks?

Secondly; you mentioned that there is now a sense of urgency in addressing the Darfur crisis. It has been almost a year since the Darfur Peace Agreement; you have had a lot of meetings; what has actually been achieved in practical terms from your visit? Is there anything new in practical terms that will move the peace process forward?

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: You have two extremes when it comes to the Darfur Peace Agreement, the Abuja agreement. One is a complete re-negotiation [of the DPA], and the other extreme is “take it or leave it.”

We have been assured during these talks – which are still continuing of course – that none of these extreme positions ought to be accepted. That leaves diplomatic space that we will try to use. There have been discussions on a number of issues where there have been developments. There is also the fact that since the signing of Abuja, time has been going by with no progress. So the discussions on compensation, for instance, are ongoing and there is an interesting development in this regard. I can also see that that there is a readiness to talk about the real issues; the real problems. We have to focus on what is it that constitutes a solution? What is it that finally can make us reach peace? That is what we have to aim for and the Darfur Peace Agreement is one of the basic elements of the mandate given to us.

As to results, well, I just have in front of me a statement from the government on the humanitarian communities’ work. We had a very long discussion on this matter – maybe for an hour – on the humanitarian situation with Dr. Khalifa [Majzoub Al Khalifa, Presidential Advisor. The meeting referred to was held on 13 February]. The representative of the United Nations and also our African Union colleagues’ –who were in the meeting- presented very clearly to the Sudanese side the humanitarian difficulties confronted in Darfur. We made an appeal to the government side to confirm the important and positive role played by the international community [to address the humanitarian situation]. Many of the humanitarian workers feel indeed that they are now targets and that they are subjected to harassments and so on. This discussion resulted in a statement that was issued recently by the Government, which says and I quote *“the government affirms its commitment to cooperate with the United Nations, the African Union and concerned humanitarian organizations; affirms its commitment to protect humanitarian aid workers and support them so that they can carry out their missions; and expresses acknowledgement and appreciation to the international community for the humanitarian relief rendered particularly by non-government organizations. Furthermore, the government is also appreciative of the sacrifices made by humanitarian aid workers so as to reach out to the needy.”*

I was glad to see this statement issued as a result of our talks but, of course, this is just the beginning of a process. We would hope that we would see also a reduction of violence and that we would see conditions conducive to the talks develop in during the next few weeks.

Salim, would you like to add anything?

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: I just want to say something on the issue of amendments [to the DPA] and so on. The government made it clear in our discussions that they see the need for an improvement [on the DPA text]. As Jan put it, there are two extremes with some saying that they totally reject the Darfur Peace Agreement while the other side says the Darfur Peace Agreement can not be touched. These are two extremes. The basis we are going to operate on is that there is scope for improvement [of the DPA]. There are well known issues –known even since when we were in Abuja- that could be improved upon. An agreement is always a dynamic thing. The agreement is to secure peace and if that agreement has some difficulties to secure peace, you have got to find what to do to overcome those difficulties and that is the challenge before us.

Q: *(inaudible ... question on concrete results of the two Envoys discussions during their joint visit)*

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: Well that is the whole purpose of consulting. First we have to know from all the stakeholders their areas of concern. And you know that one of the unfortunate developments in the aftermath of Abuja is that whereas in Abuja we were dealing basically with two movements, or we could say three movements – the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Mini Minnawi, the Sudan Liberation Movement led by AbdulWahid and the Justice and Equality Movement led by Dr. Khalil – now we have a fragmentation of the movements. There are so many other groups which have appeared.

The one thing which we don't want is not to consult everybody. One of the – I wouldn't want to call it error – but one of the shortcomings we had in Abuja is that we had people who were outside [the framework of Abuja peace talks] and wanted to join in the negotiations, as a means of protecting the position of their movements. We said no, we will stick to the movements which were there. But there were people - for example Engineer Mohamed Saleh if I remember- who wanted to be part of the agreement but at one time literally threatened us even, that “if you don't do that you will have the consequences” and so on. But this time round, honestly, we are going to see to it that we are going to try and consult, literally, as widely as possible. That is important. And only on that basis will we be in the position to say, for example, on power sharing these are the views which we think will help; on security arrangements these are the views that we think will help. So consultations are essential. But these consultations, again, are not an endless process. We are going to operate with a sense of urgency because if you say “let us continue to consult”, we say that the more you consult, the more you take time, the more people die and the more people suffer in Darfur.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: I just wanted to say one more thing: the preparation of negotiations has two parts. One: The movements have consolidated their positions – and ideally unify their position. We got signals during our talks with them that there is a strong desire to move towards consolidation and a unification of their positions. Two: The movements have to identify their grievances for consideration during the talks. These are the two tracks that we are now pursuing and we have, hopefully, managed to push this process forward.

Q: My first question is to Dr. Salim who just mentioned that there are always new factions in these Darfur movements. How then can these factions manage to stop from fragmenting anew and thus perpetuate the problem of fragmentation – especially the movements formed in the post-Abuja period?

Mr. Eliasson, why is the mechanism for controlling the ceasefire in Darfur still weak? And can not even criticize those violating the ceasefire and even with the 3-phase assistance which seems not to be enough. How can this ceasefire monitoring mechanism be strengthened and made efficient and start criticizing the wrongdoers?

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: On the issue of fragmentation of the movements, clearly that poses a challenge for the process and also poses a challenge for the movements themselves. Of course only the movements themselves can help us in this.

But we were very encouraged in our discussions here. First in our discussions with those who are signatories to the Declaration of Commitment, when we met with them here; they were all talking about the importance of the unification of efforts. When we went to North Darfur yesterday and met with the field commanders, we met actually with a committee which is preparing for the meeting of the field commanders. The idea is to try to harmonize and unify the position of those field commanders who are at this point outside the Abuja Agreement and have not signed it.

Our positions, Jan and I, in our official capacity, has been to encourage them to say that this is the right way, and they should hold this meeting because if this meeting could end up with something concrete in terms of harmonizing the position of the field commanders, we believe that will be helpful.

On the question of the ceasefire, you are right. We still have some problems. We need to enhance the capacity of the African Union, and it is my belief that the decision taken in Addis Ababa again was a 3-pronged approach to deal with how to enhance the peacekeeping capacity. I think that that is a decision which, if implemented, will make a difference. But I want to say that neither Jan nor I want to get into this debate about the different phases of the peacekeeping because that is not our brief. But I will say that the government of Sudan, at the level of the President, during in the meeting in Addis Ababa, had made already very clear its support to the heavy package. And the heavy package, when implemented, will certainly boost and enhance the capacity of the ceasefire monitors in Darfur. My hope, and we made this point when we met with foreign minister Dr. Lam Akol; Mr. Nafei [Assistant to the President]; and Dr. Majzoub el-Khalifa, is to have the Government of Sudan respond to the letter sent by both the United Nations and the African Union on this issue. In the meetings we had with Government officials, we emphasized to all them the importance and the urgency of the government of Sudan giving a formal response to this communication. And I think that this will certainly help to improve the situation on the ground and enhance the capacity of the African forces in Darfur.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: I have nothing to add to this.

Q: It is good that you said that at the end the solution to the Darfur problem will be of the Sudanese. So, you said you want all Sudanese to be part of the solution to the Darfur problem. Have you consulted the opposition parties especially here in northern Sudan, who has got influence on the situation in Darfur? In one way or another, they are part of the problem but also they could be part of the solution. In your visit it seems you have concentrated only on government officials and non-Darfur Peace Agreement signatories. We would like to hear something from you on the e opposition parties in Sudan – especially in northern Sudan, such as the Umma Party, the Popular Congress Party and the rest.

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: Quite frankly, we have not yet consulted [with the parties mentioned by the journalist] but I think your observations are very pertinent and in the next round, that is an area which we will focus on because as we said, and you rightly pointed it out, we are talking of the future of Darfur and only the Sudanese people can ultimately make a decision on the future of Darfur. Whatever opinion, suggestion or assistance we can get, not only from the government or the DPA signatories and non-signatories, but also from the political forces in the country, will certainly be a welcomed development.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: I have worked on Sudanese issue since 1993. I was Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs at the time and that is when I first met with President Bashir, by the way. But I also from that time onwards have been maintaining good contacts with the SPLM representatives since we developed and established Operation Lifeline Sudan. I also met several Sudanese politicians at the time. Of course, it is always good when you have full unity around major national goals but, for us in this mission, the first responsibility is to talk to the government and to the other parties to the conflict.

But what I would like to say on this point is that there was an interesting comment made by one of the tribal leaders today when he talked about the children in the camps and the next generation in Darfur. He said, “They are growing up in a military culture; we have a rich history, traditions and culture but the children are growing up in a military culture. They have to come back to the civilian values and to the values that we have to build the future of our society on”.

So therefore, I think it was particularly rewarding that during the visit to Darfur we met not only the IDPs, but also tribal leaders who represent that rich culture of Darfur, that rich culture of Sudan. And that is why we have as part of the Darfur Peace Agreement the Darfur-Darfur dialogue in which we are all involved. Monique Mukaruliza [Acting Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson for Sudan] knows more than I do on this issue as she is dealing with it on behalf of the AU . This is an aspect that we will of course build on as time goes by.

Q: In your statements, you focused on the political solution to the problem of Darfur and you did say that the parties to the conflict have confirmed the feasibility of a political solution to this problem. The African Union represents a regional will whereas the United Nations represents the international will but sometimes we hear statements from some UK and US officials on the Darfur issue. The US, for instance, has spoken of a “Plan B”. My question is: do the US and the UK operate in isolation with the United Nations and the African Union on the issue of Darfur?

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: I can not speak for individual members of the United Nations, particularly those who have the powerful position of being members of the Security Council. I can only say that they are extremely interested in following this issue very closely. I myself started my mission on the first of January, I was in New York on the 2nd of January and I met all 5 Permanent Members of the Security Council and they all follow the developments in Darfur extremely closely and expect of course reports from the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the evolving situation.

As to the plans and the projects contemplated by the Permanent Members of the Security Council, it is not for me to elaborate upon.

Q: You have spoken about the openness of the government to the improvement of the Darfur Peace Agreement. Now the government has refused to give visas to the human rights fact-finding mission. What is the guarantee that the government will implement their openness openly?

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: There are two issues. One is the issue of the visa to the UNHRC delegation; that is one issue which I don't think we can answer. But of course I can express hope that the mission will be allowed to come into the country because Sudan itself had been involved in the decision which was made [to send the Mission to Darfur] and I think this is important, bearing in mind the concerns of the international community on the issue of human rights and the statements which were made – though some of them may be right; some of them may be wrong- and nothing is better than to have a factual [fact-finding] mission from the United Nations to verify the situation. So that is one thing.

In terms of openness, point number one: there can not be a military solution to the crisis in Darfur. I think that should be clear to everybody. No matter how many military operations are carried out either by the government or by the movements, the result is only suffering, death and destruction for the ordinary people. One has to recognize that there can not be a military solution.

Secondly; there was this agreement [DPA] which all of us hoped would bring about peace. When we were in Darfur and talking to the tribal leaders, it was a very moving experience how they said they were already preparing to celebrate peace and so on and were therefore so disappointed that some did not come on board and so disappointed that the conflict has continued.

We have to find a solution and a solution has to be in terms of looking at those legitimate areas of concern because, of course, in these negotiations, everybody can come with his own agenda. But the issue is: what are those areas which are legitimate and which we consider to be legitimate and we can get a consensus on? And I don't see why the government of Sudan should tell us they are not prepared to see improvements [on the DPA] because this question to avoid two extremes is something we have discussed with the government of Sudan and I think they are very clear on that [they are willing to consider improvements]. And I don't see how they can say they are prepared to see improvements only to please us, because they don't have to please me and Jan Eliasson. It is a question of the future of this country.

So I expect cooperation from the government of Sudan; I also expect cooperation from the movements – those who have not signed and i those who have signed [the DPA].

One further thing since you raised this question. I think that as we try to invigorate this process, I think it is extremely important, both for the government and for the movements, to make some gestures towards peace; gestures towards the de-escalation of the conflict; avoidance of a continuation of hostilities wherever possible. I think this is incumbent on the government, incumbent on the movements. But I believe the government, as the institution which is primarily responsible for security in the country, has the greater responsibility to exercise more restraint and to show the example, and therefore to have the moral high ground, so to say, so that the movements also can respond accordingly.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: Any negotiation requires a give and take attitude. If you have demands on which you can not budge, then of course you may, perhaps with your strength degree during the negotiations or even on the ground, impose solutions. But those solutions are not lasting ones. And we are here to start a process where there is a give and take attitude and a lasting solution.

As to the visas, we hope that there will be a positive development in a spirit of openness and transparency. We have 13,000 people working here out of which 1,000 are internationals. They have problems sometimes with visas and with work permits and we hope very much that the government, in the spirit of this declaration that I just read out [on humanitarian work], will also be forthcoming on such visa issues.

Q: You spoke of the need for gestures. Did you ask for and did you receive commitments by the government to stop bombing raids in Darfur which the African Union reported about three days ago as the latest?

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: We have asked for the de-escalation of violence. As far as the bombing is concerned, I think the African Union position has been made clear by the statement which was issued in el-Fasher. And certainly when we meet with the government, this is an issue we raise.

We were impressed when we met with the commanders in North Darfur. They told us clearly they will not initiate any hostilities – which I thought was an important statement. We would also expect from the government a similar commitment. It is not just a question of bombing, it is a question of the whole range of operations in the country; it is a question of the role of the *Janjaweed* in the area. And I am saying in this respect that that government has to exercise restraint; the movements have to exercise restraint – those who are signatories but also those who are not signatories [to the DPA] have an equal responsibility to try and provide relief for their people and also to create conditions which make the resumption of negotiations more propitious.

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: To put it very simply, we took up [with Government officials] the issue of the bombings that have taken place the last few months and particularly the ones that happened on Sunday and expressed great concern about these actions, as we did also about arming and helping militias. But I think it is also very important that we also put similar and equal requirements to the movements, and offensive operations against government position are also to be criticized.

What we hope for now is that with this process of negotiations – hopefully starting now – is to ensure that the best way to prove the political will to move forward is to continue the reduction of violence. And on this we will, all of us, particularly the press, have to watch the developments very closely.

Q: A quick follow up: did you get an indication from the government that they are going to stop bombing or did you just raise it and they didn't say anything?

UNSG Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: The answer on this issue of the bombing [from the Government] was that it was in reaction to attacks by the National Redemption Front in North Darfur.

AU Special Envoy Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim: The real reactions will be in the events that follow. We will all be watching. Every time there is a bombardment somewhere, unfortunately the people who are victims are the ordinary civilians. Every time an operation is carried out either by the government or by the movements, invariably people who are most affected are civilians. And whom are we talking about? We are talking about Sudanese, whether Sudanese belonging to the government or Sudanese belonging to the movements.

So really I think it is a responsibility that should be on the conscious of the government and should be in the conscious of the movements.

Thank you very much.