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Press Briefing by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, LAKHDAR BRAHIMI

Below is a near verbatim transcript of the press conference by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Lakhdar Brahimi, held on 25 May 2006 at UNMIS Press Briefing Room, Ramsis Building.

Spokesperson Bahaa: Thank you for coming and please switch off your mobile phones.

I hand the floor immediately to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Pronk.

SRSB Pronk: Thank you.

This press conference is a press conference to be given by the Special Envoy Mr. Brahimi, together with Mr. Annabi who was here already six weeks ago on a pre-mission. This mission by the Special Envoy is a result of contact between the Secretary-General of the UN and President Bashir.

You have the floor, Mr. Brahimi.

Special Envoy Brahimi: May I first say thank you to Mr. Jan Pronk and his colleagues here for the excellent work they are doing and for the support we have received from them during our stay here.

I will now read my opening remarks in Arabic. The text in English is available. And then I will answer questions in Arabic, English and French.

[Reading the text from the Arabic]

1. At the request of the Secretary-General, I traveled to Sudan with Hédi Annabi, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and a small team of UN officials, to consult with senior Government officials on the role the United Nations could play in the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, including the proposed transition from the

African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) to a United Nations peace operation, as envisaged by the African Union Peace and Security Council in their communiqué of 15 May 2006.

2. I very much appreciated the opportunity to meet with President Bashir earlier today to discuss this very important subject. During my visit I also had the opportunity to meet with First Vice President Salva Kiir and a number of senior Government officials, including the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ahmed Ibrahim El Tahir and a number of his colleagues in the parliament, Foreign Minister Lam Akol, the Minister of the Interior, Zubeid Bashir Taha, Presidential Advisers Mustafa Ismail, Majzoub Khalifa and Abdallah Ali Masar, and Deputy Foreign Minister Al Samani Al Wasila. I also met with the Head of the African Union Mission in Sudan, Baba Gana Kingibe, and members of the diplomatic community based in Khartoum.
3. In all my discussions I congratulated the Government on the successful conclusion of the Abuja peace process. I made clear that the Darfur Peace Agreement was the basis for bringing peace to the region and that all parties must join the agreement and implement it in good faith. Those who do not will be taking a grave responsibility.
4. I stressed that the primary purpose of the United Nations in Darfur has always been, and continues to be to help the region recover and reestablish peace and stability for the benefit of all its inhabitants. What is needed now, urgently, is to mobilize all efforts to assist in the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement in all four of its major aspects: power sharing, wealth sharing, security arrangements and the Darfur Darfur Dialogue. The Darfur Peace Agreement would provide the framework for the proposed United Nations operation in Darfur.
5. I also noted that this is exactly what is happening in South Sudan, where military, police and civilian personnel from the United Nations Mission in Sudan – UNMIS – are directly involved in implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.
6. In addition, I reminded the Government that the United Nations is not in the business of imposing its presence on anyone, and that a UN operation in Darfur would be an extension of UNMIS. It would be a peacekeeping operation, conducted with the consent and cooperation of the Government of Sudan and other parties concerned, and building on the achievements of AMIS, as well as the large scale humanitarian work already being performed in Darfur by the United Nations.
7. I listened closely to the questions and concerns of the Government, which, of course, I will convey faithfully to the Secretary-General. These discussions have been extremely useful for us and we think that they were also useful for the Government of Sudan. I reassured my interlocutors that the intention of the United Nations was to help them and the people of Darfur successfully implement the agreement signed in Abuja on 5 May, by using all the resources at its disposal. This would mean a multi-dimensional presence in Darfur, covering, among other things, humanitarian assistance, human rights, support for voluntary returns and longer-term recovery, in addition to implementing the security aspects of the agreement.
8. On this basis, we agreed that, in the coming days, the United Nations and the African Union will send a joint assessment mission to Sudan. This mission will build on the telephone conversation which took place recently between President Bashir and the Secretary-General, the consultations which took place during the 14 and 19 April visit to Sudan of Mr. Annabi and the current visit of myself and colleagues.
9. This joint mission of the United Nations and the African Union will start with detailed and wide ranging consultations in Khartoum. It will then proceed to Darfur to assess the additional needs of AMIS, which must be immediately strengthened since it will have the initial responsibility of facilitating the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement. The mission would also undertake an assessment of all the requirements for a possible transition from the AU to the UN.

The team would return to Khartoum, for one more round of consultations with the authorities, before leaving to report to the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. These activities would be undertaken without prejudice to the future decisions that the Government of National Unity, the African Union and the United Nations may take on this issue.

10. The visit of the joint team, which will be composed of senior United Nations and African Union officials, will be an important step in the ongoing cooperation between the Government of Sudan and the international community, and in their collective efforts to bring peace, stability and prosperity to Sudan.

Spokesperson Bahaa: Now we open the floor for questions and answers. Please identify yourself and the media organisation you work for.

Q: [*in Arabic*] My first question: we have just attended a press conference by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sudan in which he said that the discussions between the government of Sudan and the UN has resulted in the formation of a tripartite committee made up of the AU, the UN and the Sudan government to reach agreement on what role the UN could play [*vis-à-vis* Darfur]. You now surprise us by saying that agreement has already been reached on the sending of the assessment mission to Darfur. There is a big difference between these.

We asked the minister specifically on whether government has accepted the assessment mission to Darfur as stipulated in the recent Security Council Resolution, he said this has not been agreed upon to date. You now surprise us with something new.

Two; you said that all this is taking place within the framework of the peace agreement reached in Abuja. Nowhere has it been stipulated in the DPA that the UN will play a role on the issue. On what does the UN base its quest for a role in Darfur?

Thank you.

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] First of all and on the Security Council resolution, this resolution in question does not specify a future role for the UN. It only requests the Secretary-General to send a mission to Sudan.

I am aware that the brothers in Sudan at all levels have been negatively affected by the resolution and I do understand that.

I think that what was agreed upon was very clear despite the fact there was no written agreement. This is that the UN and the AU will send to Khartoum a joint mission and that this mission will start its work in consultations with the Sudan government; and that it will continue discussions on the basis of what we have agreed upon with them at this stage; to assist the African Union in continuing its work, it was also clear that it has an assessment has to be carried out of its needs.

The African Union is present here and you have accepted its presence and you do agree that it needs a lot of assistance. This requires an assessment.

We also say that the Sudan government has the right, at any time, to accept or reject a future United Nations role in Darfur. This right is valid and the foreign minister is right in pointing that out. But this does not contradict the fact that the United Nations, in collaboration with the

African Union and the government of Sudan should assess the needs and the obligations in the event that an agreement is reached on a future United Nations role in Darfur.

Consequently, the foreign minister may have expressed a view in a way different from mine but I do not think there is disagreement between us. envisage

Q: I wonder whether you could just explain in English for the benefit of the English listeners: have you secured the agreement of the Sudanese government for this technical assessment team to be sent into Darfur as stipulated in the Security Council Resolution last week because we just had a press conference with the foreign minister he suggested that there were meetings that will come but not a technical assessment team as was stipulated in the resolution.

Special Envoy Brahimi: I will try and repeat in English what I just said in Arabic.

I think that we have agreed that a joint team of the AU and the UN will come in the next few days. We have also agreed very clearly that this meeting will start to work here. We have agreed also that it is extremely urgent, if the AU is to continue its work, that we assess their needs and see how we can get the necessary support for them to do their job. I think we have also made it very clear, from New York and also in our discussion here, that whatever we do here or in Darfur or anywhere else is without prejudice to the sovereign decision of the Sudan concerning a future mission of the United Nations in Darfur.

We foresee here a peacekeeping mission. A peacekeeping mission that comes here with the agreement of the government and the parties in the Sudan.

It is not an enforcement. We are not talking about an enforcement ... to enforce what? What we are saying here is that we will come within the framework of the agreement that was signed in Abuja ... if we can.

So, I think, it is and it will be indispensable at some stage to go to Darfur, to see what the needs of the African Union are and the needs of the United Nations may be if a successive mission is going to take place after the African Union.

I think in all our discussions, I think that was what was discussed.

Q: With all due respect, Mr. Brahimi, you came here to try and move forward the process of transition from the African Union to the United Nations and specifically trying to get this United Nations assessment technical team in. All you have got is a promise of more discussions. It would seem that your trip has been a complete failure.

Special Envoy Brahimi: If you like, that is fine with me. But I think that my judgement is slightly different from yours. I think that what we have come here for it to reassure the government of Sudan that we are not going to invade Sudan. They were very, very upset by this resolution which they did not expect. I think what they expected after the signature of the agreement in Abuja is to be congratulated. Then this resolution came as a shock to them and we have come to assure them that whatever that resolution says, nobody is thinking of invading Sudan.

They have told us in no uncertain terms that they want to cooperate with the United Nations; that they are cooperating with the United Nations, and I think that the next mission that will come here will have discussions here, will go to Darfur and will complete their discussions here.

Sudan is a sovereign state and, as a sovereign state, may accept or refuse a peacekeeping mission.

Q: Now that Sudan has agreed to allow that technical joint mission to come to Sudan, do you think that this is a positive first step towards transition in Darfur?

Special Envoy Brahimi: I think it is positive first step towards the discussions that need to take place on the preparations of how to implement the agreement of Abuja first through the African Union – please don't forget that – but there are several months and these few months are going to be critical for that agreement. And that we have got to make sure that the African Union, supported by the United Nations as is the case now, is going to be able to do their job during this initial period.

After that there will be most probably, if the Sudan agrees ... and I think they will agree, a succession mission led by the United Nations.

Q: What makes you think they will agree?

Special Envoy Brahimi: Because I hope that we have started to reassure them that nobody is thinking of invading Sudan; nobody is thinking of bypassing the state of Sudan; and that what we are thinking is of continuing the cooperation that exists between us; that what we are thinking of, ultimately, is of an extension of UNMIS that is already in the south and that they [i.e. UNMIS] will enlarge their activities to include Darfur. And I think cooperation in the south is very, very well with UNMIS; I don't see why it would be horrible in Darfur.

Q: [*in Arabic*] You talk of an extension of the UNMIS. And it is known that the United Nations is yet to reach full strength in southern Sudan. So will the UN come in with more forces other than those currently on the ground in southern Sudan or redeploy some of its forces from southern Sudan to Darfur?

If it is true that a United Nations force to Darfur will not be imposed upon government, then surely there is no need for talk of such an envisaged extension ... can you please elaborate more on the issue?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] I think that what I said, again, is that what is required in the near future is to strengthen the African Union to best carry out its mandated task and this requires resources other than those at their disposal.

Secondly; the African Union on 15th May in Addis Ababa, said that they wanted at one point a transition to the United Nations. This is the issue which we have started discussions on with the government and will continue in such discussions with the government.

Should the government accept, what will happen is that the UNMIS currently on the ground and operating in the south will extend its responsibilities to Darfur. This will require other resources – material and military. What happened in the south is that the situation is good

and, consequently, the United Nations may not need all those forces. These are the details of what we are going to discuss with the government of Sudan and with the African Union – on what are the future needs for the implementation of the agreement [*the Darfur Peace Agreement*].

We are not coming to Darfur on a leisure trip but to assist and cooperate in implementation of the agreement reached in Abuja - have you read the agreement? It is a volume with millions of things that have to be observed. The African Union will start the job and, should agreement be reached that a United Nations mission come in, then it will continue the job that the African Union has started.

Q: [*in Arabic*] Does this mean that the UN will redeploy some of its troops from the south to Darfur or not?

Why doesn't the United Nations complete deployment to its mandate full strength [*in southern Sudan*]?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] Mr. Pronk will answer that question for you.

SRSG Jan Pronk: As against your assumption, we are complete - maybe ten or twenty below the 10,000 but that is always the case on rotation basis. We are complete as far as the military is concerned. We have to do a major job in the south and there are quite a number of conflicts which we, together with the Government of South Sudan, helped to contain - some tribal conflicts and also the Other Armed Groups who are not yet completely integrated either in the northern or in the southern army ... and there was also the well-known problem of the LRA – just to mention three. That means that we need the 10,000 troops in the south – we need them.

Of course, nobody would exclude that some who have served in the south can serve somewhere else in a DPKO mission, but we need 10,000 troops in the south. We can not leave the Sudanese who did agree on the CPA alone.

Q: [*in Arabic*] The recent United Nations Security Council Resolution clearly mentions a Chapter VII mandate for the envisaged United Nations mission – that means the use of force. What you talk of at the moment is an extension of the current mission on the ground. Will it be on the basis of a Chapter VII or a Chapter VI mandate?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] I do not exactly know what the resolution says in that connection. But this is not the resolution that establishes the United Nations mission or the extension of UNMIS to Darfur.

All that this resolution says is that the United Nations Secretary-General sends a mission to discuss on the issue of transition from the African Union to the United Nations. This mission will have the functions of gathering enough information that will enable the Secretary-General to present a report to the Security Council and, on the basis of that report, the mandate specifying the future role of the United Nations may be drafted.

So it is still early to talk about the contents of that report and, consequently, that mandate. This will come out as a result of an assessment of the situation on the ground, discussions with the African Union and with the government of Sudan. So it is still early to talk about it.

The UNMIS in the south has some elements of a Chapter VI and some elements of a Chapter VII operation. My view is that should the United Nations be granted a role in Darfur, it would also take the same form – some functions that require a Chapter VII element will have those elements in the mandate and those that require a Chapter VI mandate will have the same.

This is not and will never be an enforcement mission. What is there that is to be enforced in Darfur especially after the agreement reached?

There is an agreement [*for Darfur*]. True that it is a fragile agreement; true the agreement requires more backing and support, but in principle, what happened in Darfur is the same as what happened in southern Sudan. So should the United Nations come in to assist in the implementation of that agreement, then the model will be the United Nations role in assisting in the implementation of the CPA in the south.

Thank you.

Q: [*in Arabic*] You just described the Darfur Peace Agreement as fragile. Did Mr. Pronk's visit to Dr. Turabi come in the context of convincing – as reported in some of the local media - the JEM and the others to join the DPA?

My second question; a memorandum has been raised to UNMIS by the people affected by the Meroe dam ...?

On the Eastern Front; there is a United Nations initiative to resolve the issue of eastern Sudan. Any updates?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] I would answer you very briefly on the second question: I don't have any idea about the issue.

Maybe Mr. Pronk can answer your first question.

SRSG Pronk: On the east, I think we should discuss that much later. This is a day whereby we have the 5th anniversary of the Independence of Eritrea which is a great day. And I am very pleased that the day is also being commemorated in the presence of a very high delegation coming from Sudan and that is a very good signal.

Secondly, as far as the Meroe dam is concerned, no issue for today – that is for later.

Thirdly; that is important. I had a discussion with Mr. Turabi. The United Nations does not only speak with the government; it speaks also with opposition parties and that includes the party of Mr. Turabi.

Mr. Turabi made it very clear to me that he is in favour of peace. He is in favour of United Nations presence. He belongs to the opposition of the government and that of course is a rather complex situation.

So we had discussions on these ... very constructive discussions which we will continue. I have asked Mr. Turabi to be in favour of peace in Darfur and to work with the United Nations in all the capacities which we have, to the benefit of the people of Darfur.

I was rather satisfied with his answer but he should speak for himself.

Thank you very much.

Q: [*in Arabic*] Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, seems confident that the Sudan government will agree to a deployment of international forces and so on. Should such a deployment occur, there is, apart from the government rejection, the rejection by the people in Darfur [*to such a deployment*] and you and indeed all of us are aware that the people of Darfur are initially mobilised against the issue of international forces. How are you going to contend with that?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] This is not correct. It is you who is embattled against the United Nations.

There is this talk that perceives the international forces as those forces that invaded Iraq. The forces we are talking about are those forces that are forces similar to those forces currently in the south. I have not heard anyone say that the forces in the south are invading or unwanted forces. That is the first point.

Secondly, the UN is not rejected in Darfur. The UN provides humanitarian assistance to between 1.5 and 2 million people in Darfur. The people of Darfur are aware of that. Should the United Nations go there, be it in the form of a civilian or military presence, it will be the humanitarian organisation it is that goes to Darfur to assist and not invade or bring back colonial rule to Darfur.

In fact there is some talk about things other than the United Nations but of other things. Those who speak about Iraq should speak about Iraq; those who speak about the US invasion of Iraq should speak about the US invasion of Iraq. But when you speak about the United Nations, then please talk about the UN as you know it – the United Nations that has been providing food for 1.5 million people from three years ago; the United Nations that is present amongst you here in southern Sudan. “International forces” as if it is coming to invade and bombs and strikes and so on. It is really a shame that you misinform your people about these dangers that are actually not there.

Q: [*in Arabic*] What then would you say about the statement attributed to AlQaeda saying that it will go active in Darfur should the deployment ...

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] Are you with AlQaeda?

Q: [*in Arabic*] No I am not with AlQaeda ...

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] Next question then, please.

Q: [*in Arabic*] The recent United Nations Security Council Resolution on Darfur has issued a Chapter VII recommendation that calls for the use of force in intervention. The reservations that the government of Sudan has expressed, as we have learnt from observers, is because the intervention comes as under a Chapter VII while there are a number of problems around the world, this is not my view but that of many others, in which the United Nations has not intervened through a Chapter VII operation.

Don't you think that resorting to a Chapter VII and the unclear picture that local, or international public opinion has of the issue is the cause for these hardliner positions held either by the government or the local public opinion on the issue of an international intervention?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] You are totally right to say that the resolution has raised some fears, doubts and suspicions.

I repeat however that the resolution does not specify a future UN mandate for Darfur but our view is that it only requests the United Nations Secretary-General to expedite contacts with the government of Sudan to find out what are the requirements for the next stage.

Two; I said and repeat that first of all, the United Nations Secretary-General and those who work with him do not envisage an operation in Sudan – Darfur or elsewhere – without the consent of the Sudan.

Three; I said that the role of such a peace mission, if it takes place, will be determined based on the outcome of discussions with the Sudan government and the people of Sudan and within the framework of the agreement reached in Abuja.

I do understand the unease, the fears, the disappointment, the misunderstandings, but hope that our visit and this meeting with the journalists, God willing, will lead to a clearer picture and assure the people. Nobody is thinking of occupying the Sudan or to impose anything on the Sudan but only to assist the Sudan in implementing the agreement it has signed.

Q: [*in Arabic*] If you could just brief us a little on the issue, it is being said that a Chapter VII mandate is resorted to in line with certain political criteria. Are these criteria pre-determined or are these criteria determined by the state that drafts a particular resolution presented to the Security Council?

That is just for our information.

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] Do not draw us into a legal discussion ...

Q: [*in Arabic*] I would like to request some clarification on three points:

First of all, the Security Council presented a report that there are states that continue to fuel the conflict in Darfur by backing the rebel groups and supplying them with arms. Chad, Libya and Eritrea. I would like to know what arrangements are there for peace in that direction.

Secondly; people keep on talking about “international forces” while no mention is made of the non-signatories to the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in Abuja who may obstruct the peace process through more violence.

Thirdly; the UN has agencies such as the UNICEF and all the other agencies that could carry out activities required in Darfur such as in the field of food, returns and reconstruction. Why doesn't the UN do this?

Special Envoy Brahimi: [*in Arabic*] Starting with your last point, all these organisations you mentioned are in Darfur – without exception. They are operating in Darfur and they are the agencies providing all that assistance to 1.5 million in Darfur.

Two; I agree with you that there are some tensions; there are some problems between Sudan and some neighbouring countries. We regret that it is so and hope that the UN and others will cooperate with the Sudan in order to help improve relations between Sudan and its neighbours. And we have in fact discussed some of these issues with the authorities.

On the non-signatories, yes, there must be some mention of them. I said in my statement to you that these non-signatories must come aboard or else will carry a major responsibility. I advise them to do so. The position they hold is wrong and unacceptable. The suffering of the people of Darfur must be brought to an end. National accord must be achieved. All must reach an agreement.

We are not talking about UN forces that may come in but of a UN presence similar to that in southern Sudan – should the government of Sudan wish it so. Again, nothing can take place without the consent of the government of Sudan.

Brothers and sisters, the Sudan is the largest country in Africa and we are in fact optimistic towards the new orientation since the signing of the CPA. This agreement reached on the Darfur issue, although fragile and in need of backing and buttressing, it is our hope that the Sudanese, in the first place, will back and consolidate and implement the agreement.

The international community, including the UN, must not have any other concern other than to assist in the implementation of these agreements and to help restore security, stability and unity in the north, south, east and west of the Sudan.

Thanks to all of you and thank you all for your patience.

Spokesperson Bahaa: Thank you very much.