



UNMIS

Office of the Spokesperson

Below is a near verbatim transcript of the press conference held by Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan Tayé-Brook Zerihoun together with UNMIS Force Commander Lt.Gen Jasbir Lidder on 28 February 2007 at the UNMIS Press Briefing Room, Ramsis Building.

Spokesperson: Good morning everybody and our apologies for the delay. You are here for the press briefing to be held by the Acting SRSG for Sudan, Mr. Taye-Brook Zerihoun, and we have also today as our guest the Force Commander of United Nations Mission in Sudan, Gen. Jasbir Lidder.

Without further ado, I would give the floor first to Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun.

ASRSG Zerihoun: Thank you Radhia and good morning to you all. Thank you for coming.

I would like to highlight a couple of points focusing mainly on the CPA. You know that much of the press attention and the world attention is on Darfur – and deservedly so – but the CPA remains really the bedrock for sustainable peace, reconciliation in Sudan. As many of you know, the mission's primary mandate and the bulk of our resources, both human and material, is devoted to assisting the Parties implement the CPA. That is our primary responsibility here and it is the priority for this mission.

There have been a number of positive developments in recent weeks , including the launch of the new currency on the 9th of January this year, the approval of the National Civil Service Commission Act and the approval of the 2007 budgets for both the National and the Government of Southern Sudan. There have been some controversial acts, as you know, primarily the Political Parties' Act, which has been approved by the National Assembly but not yet signed into law, and there have been strong opposition to it from a number of opposition parties.

The most pressing pieces of legislative work still to be achieved include a new National Security Act, the Police Act and the legislation for a Human Rights Commission and a Land Commission as well as the much-awaited Electoral Commission and Electoral Law. There are also a number of commissions which are yet to be established in southern Sudan.

As many of you know, the timeline for the elections is well behind schedule. In addition to laying the legislative framework for these elections, the Parties need to make progress on the preparation for the census which is prerequisite and they have to release the necessary funds that have been committed for the census. And I think the international community also has an important role to play in supporting the preparations for the elections and in monitoring developments and in supporting the Parties. United Nations Mission in Sudan has a small Electoral Support Unit now and we are gearing up to expand it and, before the end of this year, we expect that this unit will grow both in size and in the expertise that it will have.

There is also some encouraging development with respect to the technical ad hoc border committee which finally started its activities including field visits to communities and areas around the 1.1.'56 borders. I think the lessons of demarcation processes in other countries are that a transparent and inclusive process now will pay important dividends later. So we put a lot of importance to the process on the work of the border ad hoc commission.

There is another dimension which is very important in the timeline of implementation and this is on the Security Protocol. That is why General Lidder is here with us. As you know, the redeployment timeline lapses on the 9th of July 2007. By that time, all SAF forces in southern Sudan should be redeployed to the north. This creates its own challenges, its own priorities for us as there are very difficult and sensitive issues tied to this redeployment. These, of course as you know, include the question of Other Armed Groups, the formation of the Joint Integrated Units themselves, and the DDR process. The institutions and arrangements including the Joint Defense Board are dealing with this. We are also working through the Ceasefire Joint Committee and also the Ceasefire Political Commission to assist and help the Parties move this process forward before we get to the deadline for the redeployment.

We are also focusing in our own internal organization. We are trying to strengthen our presence in southern Sudan; we have appointed a new coordinator for the Mission's activities in southern Sudan. We are also regionalizing the structure and strengthening the support and administrative arrangement there. The Director of Administration of the United Nations Mission in Sudan is in Juba today to put the final touches to this arrangement. The intention is really to ensure that our presence in southern Sudan is strong and able to respond quickly and effectively to the demands of the implementation process in the south.

We have also developed new mechanisms to coordinate monitoring and prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) with the responsible authorities in Sudan both at the National and southern Sudan levels. As some of you must know, a workshop was held in Khartoum on the 20th of January to foster this coordination effort and also to ensure adequate information-sharing and partnership on this sensitive issue. There was also a similar workshop in Juba on the 20th of this month and the United Nations Mission in Sudan and the GoSS have established a new joint monitoring taskforce together with United Nations agencies, international NGOs and local community groups. This meeting in Juba has also agreed to launch a public information campaign on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse to raise awareness among United Nations personnel and local communities.

The UNMIS' Radio Miraya is currently operating 24 hours a day in Rumbek, Wau, Malakal and Juba. Four more sites in southern Sudan will be added next month. The radio station has contributed to the dissemination and popularization of the CPA and in supporting local authorities' efforts to fight various diseases. United Nations Mission in Sudan Public Information Officers are also cooperating in the Mine Action area and awareness campaigns for IDPs.

Other arms of the mission, including the police, have also been very active in capacity-building in southern Sudan and they have forged very close working relationships with police units both in the north and in the south and this is an ongoing effort.

In Darfur, just briefly, as you know we have responsibilities and tasks that derive from our original mandate stipulated in Resolution 1590 of the Security Council. These are mainly in the humanitarian and human rights areas. There is also a very strong component in our mandate which is support to African Union Mission in Sudan in Darfur and that, of late, has been coordinated in the context of the support packages to the AU— the Light and Heavy Support Packages— that have been negotiated. We also have a strong arrangement to support the Darfur-

Darfur Dialogue and Consultation. We have provided expertise and staff to the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee.

Among the DPA-instigated activities are the activities of the joint Special Envoys for the peace process. Special Envoys Eliasson and Salim have met with you not too long ago, explaining their activities and work here. To follow-up on their consultations here, we have established a joint mediation support team – the African Union and us – and that team is now preparing for the next visit and the next consultations of the Special Envoys. As they [the Special Envoys] explained here, the next objective for them is to meet with the political leadership of the Darfurians movements. The joint mediation support team is now hard at work to prepare for these consultations. This might include also a visit by the team to Chad to meet with some of the groups that are there.

I will stop here and will ask the Force Commander if there are any introductory remarks he would want to make and then take your questions.

FC Lt. Gen. Lidder: I think the Acting SRSR has already highlighted the overall security scenario. We are approaching the timeline of the complete redeployment of the SAF to the north and we are hopeful that the timeline will be met.

The most critical areas of security that remain is the non-deployment of the JIUs, the non-incorporation of the Other Armed Groups, a very delayed DDR process and a total lack of access in Abyei area which continues to have an unpredictable security situation. These are the four most critical areas.

We are addressing these issues in the CJMC and, at our behest; on the 6th of March we are having a comprehensive CPC session in which all the structures that are supporting the implementation of the CPA, namely the Joint Defense Board which looks after the Joint Integrated Units, the Other Armed Groups Collaborative Committee that looks after the OAGs as well as the DDR commissions of both north and south, along with the CJMC, will attend the session.

We are very hopeful that the session will be able to address the commonalities of security and related issues and come to some decisions.

Thank you.

Q & A

Q: Mr. Zerihoun, you focused on the CPA in your opening remarks but these days all eyes are turned towards Darfur especially following the fact that a government official was yesterday named by the ICC chief prosecutor as among the suspects to Darfur crimes. Don't you feel that yesterday's announcement may jeopardize the peace process in the whole of the Sudan and bring the Sudan into a confrontation with the international community?

ASRSR Zerihoun: Thank you very much. As I said, the mandate of this Mission and the reason for why we are here is mainly to help in the implementation of the CPA. I think, without exaggeration, 85% of our resources – both material and human – are devoted to that purpose. That is the most important priority that we have : to help the Parties implement the CPA. And we do that because we believe, as I am sure you do, that the CPA is really the foundation for sustainable peace. The other agreements really build on the CPA – if you look at the Power Sharing or Wealth Sharing arrangements, the guidance for that, the assumptions, are based on the CPA.

The issue of the ICC summons is something for which this Mission has no mandate or no competence. Will it affect? I frankly don't know. We will have to wait and see. But, I would be remiss in my responsibility if I don't tell you that we, the UN, have a the Memorandum of Understanding with the ICC and we have as a United Nations entity to cooperate with the ICC. We have no other mandate and obligation on the ICC and related issues.

Q: I have got two questions on different issues. The first is related to the first question: what is the impact of yesterday's evidence of the ICC given by the prosecutor on the relationship between United Nations aid agencies and the Sudanese government? You are saying you are separate but they regard you as representing the international community. Are you happy to sit around the table with [*State Minister for Humanitarian Affairs*] Ahmed Haroun now that he has been named as allegedly [*indiscernible*] the Janjaweed militia. Is that a problem for you?

The second issue is that on Sunday I was in Kadugli at the invitation of Suleiman Jamous, the rebel leader who is in the United Nations base there and your office blocked me from seeing him. Why was that? Isn't this another example of what is coming around as a cautious United Nations mission here? Don't you want people to know what is really going on here in Sudan or are you just more content with just keeping sweet with everyone on the ground?

ASRSG Zerihoun: Thank you. Starting with your last question, Mr. Suleiman Jamous is in a United Nations hospital. He is under the care of the United Nations doctors there. He is accessible. He can talk to people, as he does to his family and friends, over the phone. We have to seek his doctors' advice. There is also the issue that these are United Nations premises and people are there for medical attention and not for interviews. And we considered, and I said, he can if he wants, be interviewed over the phone.

The issue here is not that he is not made accessible because you can talk to him over the phone. It is whether it is appropriate to use United Nations medical facilities for a patient to be interviewed.

But you and I know the background to this problem. We are in sensitive discussions with the government to resolve the issue of Mr. Suleiman Jamous ...

Q: [*interrupting*] ... yet he has been there for eight months now ...

ASRSG Zerihoun: Yes, I know.

Q: So the discussions are going well. And the first question ...?

ASRSG Zerihoun: I am not finished with the previous one.

Mr. Suleiman Jamous, when he was moved to Kadugli, was under serious threat to his life and he was sick. And the former SRSG took the risk to help him because he was for the humanitarian community and for us a very important interlocutor. It is easy now with hindsight to second-guess the decisions that were made then, but in the circumstances in which we took that decision, a risk was undertaken for humanitarian purposes. We are still working to release him; we keep him informed of our efforts. You know better than I how difficult the process is. We have raised this issue at the highest levels with the Sudanese Government and the United Nations system.

Q: Maybe the mission isn't showing the same sense of risk and decision-making as it was when the former SRSG was here?

ASRSG Zerihoun: You are entitled to your opinion on that. It could well be, probably, but we work with no distinction in the way we deal in these issues with the government.

In the final analysis Mr. Suleiman Jamous has the right to leave the United Nations premises but we told him that if he leaves the United Nations premises we will not be able to protect him.

But, yes, it has been eight months; it has been a sensitive problem, a complicated problem, bears with us. It is not for lack of trying that he is there for eight months but I wish it was as easy as some people think it is.

On your first question on the impact, there is no official position on this. But certainly, we issued as some of you have seen, an advisory yesterday to our staff. We said we don't know what could happen: there could be reactions from people and, yes, the ICC is seen as part of the United Nations system and people don't make that distinction but we have no mandate in what the ICC does. There could be reactions – so far we haven't seen any. We have talked to authorities, we have talked to National Security about the implications and they have told us, for example yesterday, that there were no demonstrations planned or authorized. So we are keeping in touch with the authorities because our protection, in the final analysis, is their responsibility.

Q: What about working with Ahmed Haroun, is there a problem with that? He is the state minister for Humanitarian Affairs and obviously I would imagine there is going to be lots of transactions between yourself in the United Nations and this man.

ASRSG Zerihoun: I would seek UN legal advice on that. We had discussed this issue this morning in our own meeting. We looked into that.

Q: So your are assessing whether you could work with ...

ASRSG Zerihoun: Yes.

Q: On Friday the President [*Bashir*] was addressing Muslim congregations in the USA. He was saying that all the figures were being exaggerated by the western media. 200,000 people are said to have been killed in Darfur. According to the President, only 9,000 people died in Darfur during all these years. We just want to know the figures – where do these figures come from? Which body is responsible for giving out these figures of 200,000 while the President is saying that all these are lies? Can the United Nations tell us something about those figures being published all over the world?

ASRSG Zerihoun: As you know, we have not issued any official figures on casualties in Darfur. I think some of the agencies have done their own mortality studies. People die in Darfur as a result of conflict, people die in Darfur as a result of severe diseases and the consequences of the severe humanitarian challenges there. It is always the case that agencies or NGOs or others who work in this area, for their own planning, assess these mortality or casualty figures. We have seen it across the board not only in Sudan but elsewhere. Others extrapolate on these. But as far as I know, no official figures have been issued by the United Nations. I don't know where the figures of the government come from. I think they will be better placed to answer that question but the reality is that there is no official figure that was issued by the United Nations.

Q: What is the United Nations position on agencies such as the WFP of which the government said some days ago had large quantities of contaminated food in its stores?

The second question is to Gen. Lidder. Who is to blame for the non establishment of the JIUs – is it government or the SPLA?

ASRSG Zerihoun: On the WFP, I think a press release was issued on the issue three days ago in which they explained it very clearly. There is nothing to add beyond what they said. This is a common feature [for humanitarian operations]; it happens. And the rate of contaminated food here is much less than it is globally, I am told, but this has to do with the conditions under

which it was stored, the climate and so on and so forth. It is nothing out of the ordinary, I am told.

Maybe Radhia can give you a copy of the press release.

Spokesperson: Yes, I have the press release in Arabic and English and you are welcome to have it. I will send it to you or give it to you in person. Thank you.

FC Lt. Gen. Lidder: Regarding the Other Armed Groups (OAGs), as per the CPA, by the 9th of January last year, all OAGs were supposed to align themselves with either party. This date was extended to 9th of March and on 9th of March, we laid a restriction, that thereafter no re-alignment should be accepted. We got in June-July a list of OAGs which were aligned.

You know that as per the Juba Declaration, the complete SSDF had opted to join the SPLA but various factions split up and they joined the SAF. Various re-alignments have been taking place after that. Although technically that was not allowed, on the ground we are aware however that this happened –for instance Equatoria Defense Forces in Torit, Kone’s force in Pibor – various re-alignments have been taking place.

The OAGCC is supposed to address these issues. But in the CJMC we asked them again to give us the revised OAGs list before the next CPC meeting. In yesterday’s CJMC meeting, we received a revised OAGs list and are now analyzing them. The non-incorporation has been from both sides. It is the OAGCCs and the DDR Commissions that have to look into the whole issue in an integrated fashion.

The non-incorporation entails serious security challenges. We had major clashes in Malakal which you are all aware of. But the good news is that the OAGs which are aligned to the SAF have finally pulled out of the Bahr-el-Zeraf and Robkona areas. We hope the security situation will stabilize but the non-incorporation of OAGs continues to be one of the most critical security issues.

Q: Could you talk a little bit more about the United Nations’ role in the elections that will happen here? Do you have a sense of a big role as happened say in DR Congo or maybe a side role?

ARSRG Zerihoun: Of course it depends on what requests the Parties make to the United Nations but our major assumption is that there would be a major role for the United Nations. There is the traditional role we play in coordinating the activities and inputs of the international actors which is very important . Beyond that there is support to the process – the whole United Nations family here contributes to that effort- technical support and expert support. And there is also helping the independent electoral commission that will be set up, in capacity-building and other advisory services. And then, down the road when the elections are held, if the parties ask us to help monitor the elections, we will deploy monitors.

But the assumption, certainly for this mid-term elections -the referendum is a whole different issue-, we are organizing ourselves on the assumption that there would be a major role for the United Nations to play.

Q: Can you elaborate more on the issue of Abyei and the Border Commission?

The other thing is does the United Nations have a role to play in the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement?

ARSRG Zerihoun: On Abyei, we believe – as General Lidder also implied – it is a very important and critical issue. Beyond the fact of the dispute on the boundary, Abyei is also one area where the right to self-determination has also been guaranteed in the Agreement. So it has a unique role and responsibility.

The issue of Abyei has been entrusted to the Presidency. When the two parties discussed this issue, because of its sensitivity and because of the implications it has, they said it is an issue that should be resolved and addressed by the Presidency. This is where we have the problem. We have tried to appeal to the Presidency to address this issue. I think all of you know that Abyei is one of the issues that has been publicly discussed and where the differences have been publicly aired by the two leaderships as late as January 9th when the second Anniversary of the CPA was commemorated.

So it is an emotive issue. It is an issue which has two dimensions: that is how to deal with the problem between now and the referendum, and the focus here is more on ensuring that existing arrangements between and among communities continues to work without external political intrusion. And our people on the ground are working closely with the two communities to ensure that these traditional mechanisms which are time-tested continue to help the two parties mediate their affairs on the ground. Then there is the larger political issue, more often than not, played out in Khartoum than in Abyei. And that is where we have a deadlock. As you know, the Presidency is to meet today or tomorrow. One of the outcomes of the Yei meeting of the Interim National Bureau of the SPLM, and earlier meetings between the leadership of the two partners, was to address this issue in a meeting of the Presidency which takes place today or tomorrow. And we hope they will advance this issue a bit but it is a critical and sensitive issue.

On eastern Sudan, we were involved in that process from the beginning and we worked, I think, closely with the parties – at the time the Eastern Front – and with the Eritrean authorities to help in the negotiations process and we had contributed also to that process along with partners here by providing support, by organizing workshops for the Eastern Front and for others and by sharing the experience of Naivasha and, at that time also, Abuja, with the parties to help with the negotiations process. But I think with the help of the Eritreans, the parties have signed the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement. We have not been asked to assist in its implementation. The tripartite commission, that was set between the Government of Sudan, of Eritrea and the Eastern Front, has been doing this and I think they have been doing it well so far.

On the Border Commission, as I said earlier, we have now the Ad Hoc Commission which has started its work. It was stymied in its efforts by a number of bureaucratic and financial issues but it is now on the ground. It has gone and talked to some of these communities on the ground and we see that it is an important first step, but more needs to be done. The parties have to help and empower this Commission to work quickly, because the elections are affected by the border as far as drawing constituencies is concerned, and the referendum down the road is based on how this border issue is resolved and many other things– power sharing, wealth sharing - also will be affected. So the Border Commission's work is essential to the outcome of the political and wealth sharing issues. We are prepared to help – we have said we will help as best we can – and the appeal we have made to the parties is to empower these commissions to do their work. And this is part of the global problems; there are a number of commissions that have been set up but they have not been up and running for bureaucratic reasons, sometimes, but also for political reasons.

Q: Mine is not a question but an appeal to the Spokesperson.

Last Thursday we came here for a press conference. We waited for something like an hour and later called Gadallah and were told that the press conference was postponed. Perhaps my suggestion would help you – if you organize a press conference on Thursday, most of the news papers don't publish on Friday so it would be a waste. So my suggestion is that if you could make a press conference on Wednesday or Saturday is better than Thursday and better than late. I appreciate the one of today.

Spokesperson: Thank you very much Nicholas, point very well taken and thank you for the advice. We do apologize again because we had to cancel quite fast. However, we had very good reasons for that; our main briefer, the Acting SRSRSG, had really pressing commitments that actually clashed with the timing of the press briefing. I did my best to convey the information to everybody and I apologize to those who did not get the information on time. Thank you.

Q: The United Nations is a big mission here costing billions of dollars a year. I think people expect from it a bit more than just observing the CPA and the way it is going. Can you point of any major issue that United Nations Mission in Sudan has actually resolved or helped to resolve in any significant way? It seems there are a lot of problems in the Transitional Areas which are just sitting on the books – has anything been done?

And just to follow up from Nicholas' comment, it will be nice if United Nations Mission in Sudan would return to regular press briefings and also perhaps adopt a more welcoming and open approach taking journalists on delegation trips and trips to Darfur or southern Sudan because, as I am sure you know, it is not easy being a journalist here just as it is not easy working for the United Nations here.

ASRSRSG Zerihoun: I think we have always felt that one area where we made a difference from the beginning was on security arrangements. I think the General can speak on this. When there was a reluctance to establish the implementation institutions earlier on, we insisted that the CJMC should function on the day it was supposed to be in May 2005, and we took the parties to the meeting when they told us that they were not prepared and had not nominated their representatives on the committee and we insisted that we should do it. And I think the CJMC has done a great work in ensuring that the conventional ceasefire has been kept and that the redeployment also has been pretty much ahead of time in some areas. That is one area where I think we have done a lot, and that is a very important area because if the security situation is not stabilized then it will be futile to try to implement other aspects of the Agreement, because otherwise the parties would be busy accusing each other of reneging on the ceasefire rather than cooperating with us on the other issues.

I think our staff on the ground, I am sure you would be the first to admit that, our human rights colleagues have done a lot of work, advocacy for instance, and in terms of ensuring that corrective measures have been taken. They have done a lot of work to address critical emergencies in the humanitarian and other areas.

It is not perhaps noticed much but we have colleagues who work in the areas of Rule of Law, who support and work with the institutions – national and regional – in capacity-building and in monitoring the implementation of the Agreement insofar as the issues of Rule of Law and accountability are concerned.

In the political area, the “Good Offices” aspect has been used, I think, selectively but effectively in many areas. But the problem in Sudan is big and multi-faceted. The working relationships between the partners have not been ideal; the confidence gap has not been fully bridged and we can only do as good as the Parties let us do things.

On the particular areas as OAGs and JIUs, I will ask the Force Commander to elaborate but, as I said, we have also made concerted efforts to support the African Union despite all the problems they have, and we have been working with them closely on these packages of late to improve their work qualitatively. Perhaps, what we provide does not amount to much in terms of numbers – at least the Light Support Package. The Heavy Support Package, when it is agreed, will make a qualitative difference in the role of the African Union.

So in these areas, I think, we have made the best efforts to help the process. Now it is for you and others, and the Security Council for sure, to make the judgment on whether what we have

done was effective in the circumstances or not. But, as we have said in our reports time and time again, there are still critical gaps but those are primarily the responsibility of the Parties. We are here to help the Parties implement the agreement; we have a supportive role. We don't have an executive role here. If we did then maybe things would have been a bit different.

FC Lt. Gen. Lidder: Let me reinforce what the Acting SRSG has said. I think United Nations Mission in Sudan has played the focal role in stability in southern Sudan. Not only our structures, CJMC, AJMCs and the JMTs have been operating in nooks and corners, they have also been very pro-active in pre-empting violence which you never come to know. There were future flashpoints where violence was going to erupt. We have moved them there along with the Parties – one of them was Phom Al Zaraf. It was a total flashpoint. I will name you a whole lot of areas – Wau, Rumbek, Yambio, Juba, Robkona, Bentiu, the list is endless – where violence was about to erupt and we sent them there and pre-empted the violence. None of it gets publicized nor do we want to take the credit for it, but let me assure you that our Military Observers and the Force Protection are operating in parts of southern Sudan which are totally inaccessible.

We are also assisting the government initiatives in civilian disarmaments that are going on. After the violence which took place in Jonglei and thereafter the area of Pibor, we are assisting, in a joint integrated manner, in the civilian disarmament.

There were areas where absolute violence was about to break out and we have moved in with the support of the Parties for sure. Malakal is a typical example where a near-war took place in the town. Had it not been for the structures of the AJMC there and their pro-active role there, the situation would have been very bad.

So I think, by and large, from the security angle, we can be satisfied. Yes, we are looking at a very vast problem which has got decades of heritage but, given the circumstances and if you see the way redeployment is taking place, the way violence has been kept at controllable levels and the fact that things have not span out of control in any area, it is a creditable achievement.

There are certain areas in which we are very concerned and we are trying to assist. Let me tell you about the issue of the JIUs which is not progressing well. We have recommended to the government and to both the Parties a coordinated role in supporting the JIUs involving the complete international community with the United Nations playing a coordinating role. This has been accepted across the board. Somehow the formal approval is not coming to us. Let me assure you that if we get a formal approval of supporting the JIUs as a package, the complete international community is unified in this and we will be able to produce a package and will be able to support the JIUs - not in a piecemeal sort of requests that come here and there – but a complete package involving training, logistics, equipping and all the like. Similarly on issues of wages and the DDR.

Our people are working together with the National Monitors – and I must place on record the excellent role that has been played by the National Monitors of both SAF and the SPLA whom we have trained and whom we have integrated in our Joint Monitoring and Verification Teams. And let me tell you there is no place the United Nations is monitoring and verifying where the National Monitors from the SAF and the SPLA are not there. So wherever we go, our work has credibility, it has transparency; it has authenticity because the National Monitors are with us.

As the Acting SRSG has said, we have immense challenges and we don't shy away from them, but I am very hopeful that with the support of both the parties and the assistance of the structures that will be put in place, we shall address these problems.

ASRSG Zerihoun: Maybe I can use this opportunity to say a few words about what Jonah Fischer asked earlier about on working with ICC indicted individuals. I just recalled that we

have a precedent in that with the LRA indictees. We have guidance on how to deal with them. You will recall that the former Humanitarian Coordinator met with some of these people. So we have precedent and guidance on that. Maybe there are differences on the issues but here we will still seek advice from our people.

Q: Is it so to say that you are sort of assessing [*indescribable*]

ASRSG Zerihoun: No, the precedent we have informs that why and for what reason we meet with them is very important. For example, the meeting with the LRA indictees had to do with an effort to improve the humanitarian situation and to get more cooperation from them on the peace process. So if the objective is to advance peace, then we might meet. But I will get back to you on this.

Q: Just in context whether you will just be sitting there and having your regular meetings with Mr. Haroun on continued problems on access in Darfur; is that something you can work on on a daily basis with Mr. Haroun?

ASRSG Zerihoun: I will get back to you on that.

Spokesperson: On issues of press briefings and traveling, I will address your queries bilaterally later on.

Q: You mentioned in your briefing something about Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. I think we have two angles to this issue. First of all when this mission came here, Mr. Jan Pronk and the previous Force Commander assured that the forces would be disciplined; there will be no sexual abuse; they have learnt from lessons from other countries. But it seems now after the incident [*indiscernible*] that the peacekeepers haven't learnt their lessons.

The other thing is how the United Nations handled the issue. First came the UNICEF report on which the public was not informed ... and I think we would have done a lot of damage control if the actual report had been revealed. This is because my information, the information I heard, is that it was not only the United Nations forces that had been picked in that report but also SAF and SPLA forces. But the way the United Nations and UNICEF handled this issue made more damage to the reputation of these forces than would have been had they been open to the media institutions.

ASRSG Zerihoun: I want to assure you and I want to stress the point that this issue is of the highest priority to the United Nations – not because of Sudan but because of other earlier problems – and the institution, the Secretary-General, the leadership, have given this the highest priority and so have we here. There is no issue here in conduct and discipline that is of more concern to us than Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. We have set very strict guidelines and we have had training, we have advisories that are sent out to the staff, and I am sure that the Force Commander will also tell you about the very stringent steps that they have taken on their side. We have set the bar very high for ourselves and our people. It is an issue which is sensitive and in which allegations do not necessarily mean that there is culpability.

On the allegations in our case, we have the Conduct and Discipline Unit, we have the OIOS investigation and they have gone through a very rigorous investigation and accountability is assured in this case. We have, as you know, taken steps against certain allegations. We have taken a pro-active role now to explain our policy and assure people that there is no tolerance or impunity for this kind of action, and we are trying to impress upon communities that this is not an activity or something that is condoned by the leadership of the United Nations. We are much opposed to it and we will take all stringent measures possible to ensure that such actions, if they happen, are punished and to ensure that they don't happen – prevention is much better than cure. But it is a problem, a global problem.

Q: What about the lack of transparency? Why can't we see the report; why isn't there any more information on the UNICEF report?

Spokesperson: The report actually is not a UNICEF report full-fledged. It is a consultant report; it is an internal document and has not been released to the public. It is not a public document of UNICEF. It is a study made by one of their consultants and is an internal document but, again, you can address your question to UNICEF.

FC Lt. Gen. Lidder: I just want to add that discipline remains the bedrock of any military component all over the world and the United Nations is no different. Anywhere people are wearing blue berets, they are under the same discipline rules and regulations and what you said, we stand committed to. It is a Zero-tolerance policy. There is no question of any person committing SEA. We are taking a lot of preemptive steps in terms of training and sensitizing people and, should a case – whenever an allegation is made, let me tell you that the most stringent of investigation is carried out and action is taken.

Unfortunately quite a few of these allegations have been loose stock. No focused allegation has come to us. We request everybody, should you have any focused allegation; should somebody have any proof, please let us know so that it helps us in investigations. But a general line statement on the issue, you will agree with me, is of no use but even the generalized statements [allegations], we take them very seriously and we have taken very stringent steps after that to sensitize our people

Spokesperson : I think that was the last question and the follow up question from Jonah.

Thank you very much. We are resuming our regular press briefings and we are going to be alternating with our colleagues from the humanitarian side.

We will inform you in due course about our next event. Thank you very much for coming and see you next briefing.